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'Living and Learning' An Evaluation of the Playhouse Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy

Grant, D., & Durrer, V. (2020, Nov 30). 'Living and Learning' An Evaluation of the Playhouse Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy.

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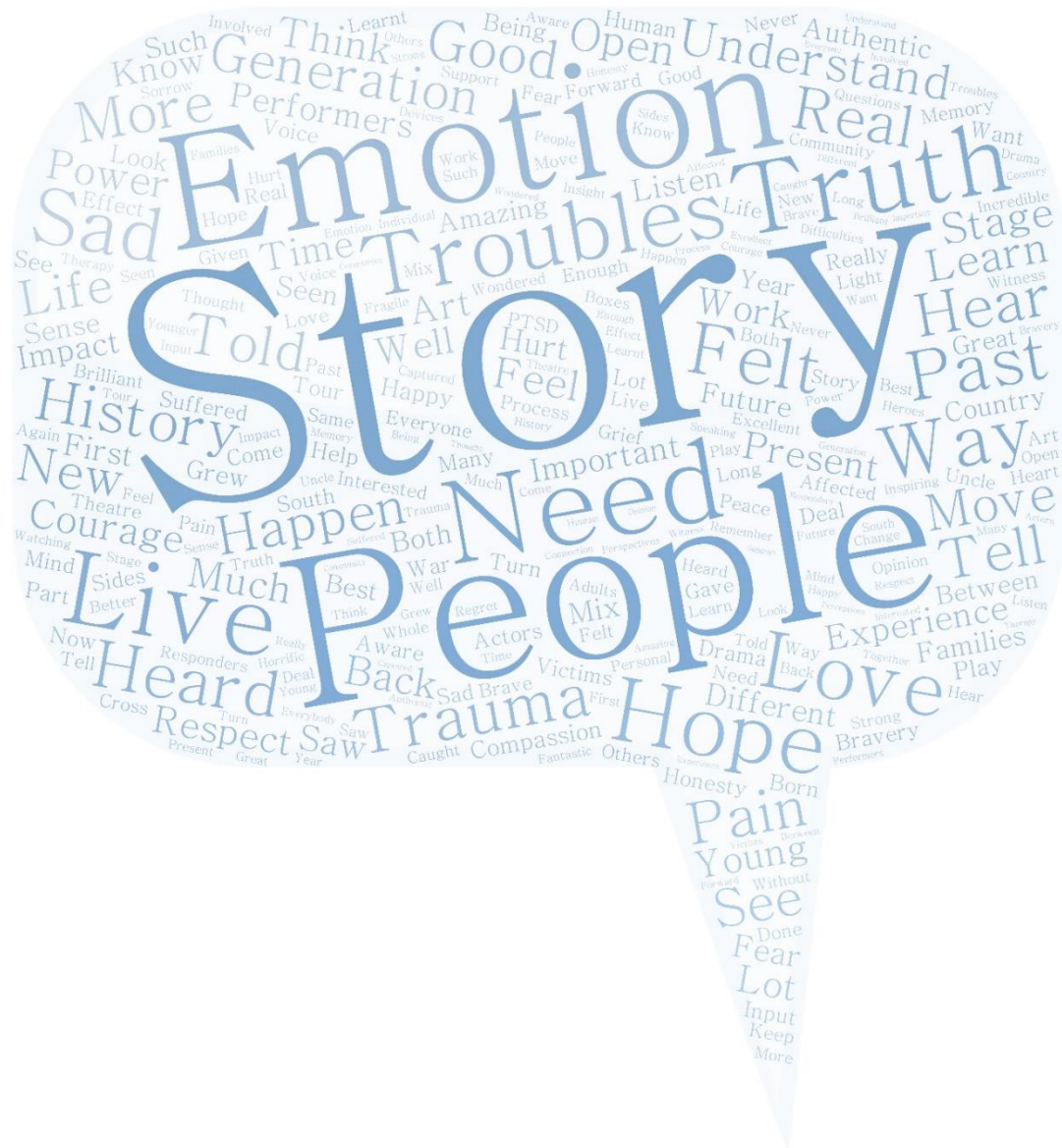
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‘LIVING AND LEARNING’

An Evaluation of the Playhouse Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy

supported by the European Union’s PEACE IV Programme,
managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)

PROJECT PARTNERS

THE NORTHWEST PLAY RESOURCE CENTRE (THE PLAYHOUSE)

THE HOLYWELL TRUST

THE THOMAS D’ARCY MCGEE FOUNDATION

QUEEN’S UNIVERSITY, BELFAST

Foreword

Evaluation can be a loaded word. Too often, as my co-investigators on the AHRC 'Arts for Reconciliation' research project that has coincided with the Playhouse Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy have discovered, what passes for evaluation is actually about accountability, reflecting a preoccupation with showing to funders that targets have been achieved. While this is important, it can inhibit effective review.

I am grateful to SEUPB that from the outset they encouraged us to take a genuinely evaluative approach to our work, allowing us to prioritise what was being learnt from this innovative programme and how this was being learned; what was going well, what was going less well, what practices would be retained in a future similar project and what would be amended.

This has allowed all the stakeholders to engage in the evaluation process with openness and honesty to provide rich qualitative data from a multiplicity of perspectives. Alongside the many positive outcomes of the diverse range of projects delivered through the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy, we have also been able to identify the many challenges and difficulties experienced by participants, artists, and the programme's Project Partners and in particular the way in which addressing these as they arose has allowed the programme to be enhanced and developed as it progressed.

Some of these challenges could not have been anticipated, and it is salutary to reflect on the fact that advance planning for crisis management was couched in terms of limiting reputational damage; no-one could have foreseen a situation in which it became impossible to deliver the public performances that were at the heart of the project plan. But even in the scramble to salvage the programme in the face of ever-increasing Covid restrictions, there was deep learning to be found, which we have sought to document here alongside all the more predictable discoveries that arose in every part of the programme.

It has been a great privilege to witness and experience the profound benefits that the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy have brought to so many participants and I would like to pay tribute here to all concerned. In particular, I should mention my co-evaluator, Victoria Durrer, our Project Partners, Gerard Deane (Holywell Trust), Anthony Russell and Tommy Fagan (the Thomas D'Arcy McGee Foundation) and, of course, Pauline Ross, Elaine Forde, Max Beer, Liam Campbell and Cindy Le Clère (The Playhouse) and Kenda Somerville and her colleagues at SEUPB, without whose support the programme would not have been possible.

David Grant

30th November, 2020

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INTRODUCTION

The Playhouse Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy was originally conceived by Pauline Ross, the Founding Director of the Playhouse, as a way of building on the legacy of the Theatre of Witness that was also supported through European Peace funding and allowed individuals whose lives had been deeply affected by the Troubles to share on stage their stories with an audience. The Theatre of Witness director, Teya Sepinuck, was keen to train others in her approach to using the arts for peacebuilding and had previously mentored two emerging artists as they directed their own Theatre of Witness productions. At a late stage in the application process for PEACE 4 funding, it became clear that Teya Sepinuck felt unable to make a commitment to an extended training programme. This was partly because the terms of the funding restricted the training to applicants from Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland and Teya believed that its specialist nature called for international recruitment. At short notice, the Playhouse therefore reshaped the programme as a series of four residencies with different “National/International artists” who in addition to leading a major project of their own would also support a number of subsidiary projects with “Local Artists” who would benefit from access to their international expertise. It was expected that the major projects would reflect the Theatre of Witness model to the extent that they use a theatre/multi-media approach to giving a platform to seven participants with direct experience of the Troubles. The local artists, while also being expected to work with a similar range of participants, could come from a wider range of creative disciplines.

As lead partner, the **Northwest Play Resource Centre** (hereinafter referred to as The Playhouse) has had a strong record of developing arts initiatives in partnership with a variety of statutory and community/voluntary sector agencies in order to promote a wide range of personal/social benefits including peacebuilding, community relations development, social inclusion and personal development. To complement that expertise, the application proposed partnerships with the **Holywell Trust** which was well connected with networks of victims and survivors, and the **Thomas D’Arcy McGee Foundation** who had strong cross-border connections. **Queen’s University** was engaged to provide independent evaluation.

The project’s aims were to use theatre as a tool to explore truth recovery, peace building and community relations issues in a safe, accessible environment. It also sought to facilitate significant cross-community interaction amongst participants from diverse backgrounds working collaboratively towards common goals and resulting in meaningful, purposeful and sustained contact between persons from different communities with the aim of promoting positive community relations attitudinal and behavioural change. It sought to target those people and communities most affected by the conflict, including representatives from interface and segregated areas, historical atrocities, victims and survivors and public sector workers who were significantly involved/impacted upon. Over a two-and-a-half-year period the project proposed to work throughout Northern Ireland/Border Counties to deliver:

- Four Scoping/Research & Development Studies, where national/international artists would meet a wide range of victims & survivors, statutory and community groups throughout N. Ireland/Border Counties and devise projects that would address their needs.
- Four National/International Residencies throughout N. Ireland/Border Counties. Residencies would last for approx. 6 months to reach 28 cross community participants in total from one or more communities. Each residency would create a multi-media theatre production that would be performed within its originating community/area and at The Playhouse.

- Eight Local Projects throughout N. Ireland/Border Counties facilitated by the Local Artists mentored in the National/International Residencies. Each local project would last c. 8-10 weeks and reach 48 community participants in total from one or more communities. Each Local Project would create a mini multi-media theatre production that will be performed within its originating community/area.
- A concluding Arts & Peace Building Conference

In addition to the selected artists the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy has also employed a Project Coordinator for the National/International Residencies (**Elaine Forde**), a Project Coordinator for the Local Projects (**Liam Campbell**) and part-time Project Administrator (0.5) (**Cindy Le Clère**). Other Playhouse staff have contributed to the project including the Artistic Director, the Theatre Producer, the Marketing Officer, CEO and Financial Manager.

Two principal artists were appointed in the first phase of the programme: **Jo Egan** who developed and directed *The Crack in Everything* which was performed at the Playhouse in Derry and the Brian Friel Theatre at Queen's University, Belfast in November and December 2018 and **Robert Rae** who developed and directed *Blood Red Lines* which was performed in Newry Town Hall, the Brian Friel Theatre and An Tain in Dundalk in February and March 2019.

The principal artists for the second phase of the programme were **Ailin Conant** who developed and directed *First Response* which was performed at The Playhouse and the Riverside Theatre, Coleraine in February and March 2020 and **Damian Gorman** who developed and wrote *Anything Can Happen*, directed by Kieran Griffiths. Because of the pandemic shutdown, performances of this final production were postponed until September 2020 and were live broadcast through the Playhouse social media channels.

Local artists were appointed in each phase of the project representing a wide range of art-forms. In December 2018, **Eileen McClory's** community dance performance, *Turf*, was performed in Cultúrlann Uí Chanáin with poetry by Maria McManus and **Conan McIvor's** short film, *Forgive Me Not* was premiered at the Playhouse. **Laurence McKeown's** multi-media production, *In the Shadow of Gullion*, which incorporated Irish traditional music and dance and film inserts by Declan Keeney was performed at Tí Chulainn, South Armagh & The Duncairn Arts Centre, Belfast in April 2019. **Emer Kenny's** album, *Ghosts*, which comprised music inspired by first-hand accounts of specific events and tragedies connected to the conflict in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties, was launched at The Spirit Store, Dundalk in November 2019. *Questions of Legacy, Podcast Conversations from Survivors of the Troubles*, featuring the WAVE Injured Group and collated and edited by **Pamela Mary Brown** were first presented in the form of an installation at the Playhouse in February 2020, and are now available online. **Declan Keeney's** virtual reality film, *Frictionless*, which explores stories from the borderlands of Ireland and **Joe Campbell's** graphic novel, *Peacemakers*, were launched during the project's closing online conference in September 2020. Finally, **Anne Crilly** directed *Beyond the Barricades* by Micheal Kerrigan, which was adapted as a live online performance on 30th September 2020.

The following report will address each of these projects in turn and present each artist's own response to their involvement in the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy (as compiled for the closing conference by Gerard Deane of the **Holywell Trust**). This will be followed by our own evaluation notes. We will then highlight specific themes emerging from the programme as a whole and put forward recommendations which we hope may inform future practice in this field, before providing a point-by-point evaluation of the project against its stated objectives.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Aim: to gather and analyse a representative range of qualitative data to allow us to assess the effectiveness of the Theatre and Peacebuilding Academy both as a means of direct and indirect peacebuilding and to build capacity in the community arts sector in Northern Ireland and beyond.

Core Principle: in doing this we sought to work in close alignment with the working methods of each of the four main projects, drawing where possible on the key practitioners' own approach to the work and reflecting the full range of participants (witnesses, performers and audiences, as appropriate).

Methods: in addition to observation of rehearsals and performances, focus groups and interviews with participants, we devised an audience questionnaire intended to prompt a wide range of responses to the affective impact of the performances. Open-ended questions encouraged respondents to express what they had seen, heard, felt, thought and learned from what they had witnessed on stage, rather than to address specific issues and attitudes relating to the plays' themes. This was to avoid them being led towards pre-determined expected outcomes. This worked well in practice, with only one negative response among the hundreds collected about the nature of the questionnaire itself.

The running-times of *The Crack in Everything* and *First Response* were both relatively short so we were able to engage more directly with audience members after each performance through voxpops, facilitated short interviews and post-show discussions. The longer running-time of *Blood Red Lines* led us to rely more on audience questionnaires. Because of the move to an online format, questionnaires were not used for *Anything Can Happen*. It is important to emphasise that because respondents were self-selecting, they cannot be taken as representative of the overall audience response. Unsurprisingly, those who chose to complete a form were broadly enthusiastic about the performance, but there were nevertheless some examples of constructive criticism which are detailed below. The emailed responses also contained a balance of positive and negative comments.

In addition to periodic interviews with the two project coordinators, for each project we engaged in the following data gathering processes:

THE CRACK IN EVERYTHING

- Pre-Project interview with Jo Egan to establish context
- Mid Project interview with Jo Egan to familiarise ourselves with the developed project
- Confidential access to Jo Egan's field notes, interviews and draft script to determine participant expectations
- Observation of selected rehearsals
- Observation of first readings of scripts to four of the six families and subsequent discussions
- Attendance at performances in Derry and Belfast including post-show discussions
- Post-show foyer "voxpops" and one-to-one facilitated interviews with audience members
- 38 Audience questionnaires
- Post-project Focus Group meeting with participants
- Post-project interview with Jo Egan
- A Drama workshop with a youth group six months after they saw the performance

BLOOD RED LINES

- A pre-project interview with Robert Rae
- Attendance at a mid-project rehearsal
- Attendance at performances in Newry, Belfast and Dundalk
- 129 Audience questionnaires
- Individual post-performance interviews with 10 of the 11 participants
- Post-project interview with Robert Rae
- Post-Project interviews with Project Partners

FIRST RESPONSE

- Pre-production, mid-production and post-production interviews with Ailin Conant
- Observation of selected rehearsals
- Observation of first full script reading and subsequent discussion
- Focus group with participants (including younger cast members)
- Attendance at performance in the Playhouse and post-show discussion
- 42 Audience questionnaires

ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN

- Pre-production, mid-production and post-production with Damian Gorman
- Mid-production interview with Kieran Griffiths (Director)
- Attendance at mid-project rehearsal
- Attendance at performance (live video relay in the Playhouse)
- Post-performance interviews with 4 of the 6 participants
- Interview with Ursula McHugh (project counsellor)
- Access to online audience feedback

LOCAL ARTISTS

With the support of the Playhouse, efforts were made by the evaluation team to engage local artists in diary writing. Influenced by the *Most Significant Change* theory¹, diaries were designed to capture each artists' own learning objectives for engaging in the Academy, how they felt they would achieve these objectives and the role of the Local Project Coordinator and Lead Artist (mentor) in supporting those goals. For various reasons, the artists did not respond to this method of data collection. Some found the format unengaging or cumbersome, while others cited workload. Focus groups proved a more fruitful means for engaging artists in a reflective dialogue with one another regarding personal goals and areas of learning. In Phase 2, there were pre- and post-project interviews. We also interviewed the Project Coordinators throughout the duration of the project and facilitated an interim evaluation meeting to reflect on what had been learnt up to that point. This allowed feedback on the first phase of the project to be acted upon during the second phase. To provide an overview of the programme and an insight into each of the 12 projects we have reproduced below an abridged version of interviews prepared by the Holywell Trust with each artist for the closing conference. This is followed by our own evaluation notes, a summary of our **key findings** and **recommendations** and a **conclusion** assessing the outcomes of the programme in relation to the objectives set out in the final funding application.

¹ Dart, J., & Davies, R. (2003). A dialogical, story-based evaluation tool: The most significant change technique. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 24(2), 137-155.

The National/International Artists

THE CRACK IN EVERYTHING

JO EGAN

The first project to be performed was written and directed by Jo Egan, a professionally produced playwright, trained oral archivist, theatre producer, director and facilitator. She is the Artistic Director of Macha Productions, a theatre company dedicated to the democratisation of theatre creation and participation. Egan has a long track record of creating theatre with both professional and community actors. She created the concept for the *Wedding Community Play* (1999), a large-scale cross-community site-specific play, which she also co-directed and produced. As Creative Producer with Kabosh, she produced new work that questioned what theatre is and where it takes place. She holds an MFA in Playwriting (TCD, Lir Academy).

Why did you choose to apply to be involved in the Theatre Peacebuilding Academy Project?

The needs of the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy spoke to the skills I've developed as a theatre artist working in communities which have seen the worst of the Northern Ireland Conflict. I was aware of the previous Theatre of Witness work and was keen to be involved. I recognised that the work The Playhouse was initiating would be an extremely important contributor to peace building using arts methodologies. I was excited by the challenge.

The Project

The Crack in Everything addressed the neglected narratives of six children who had been killed in the Troubles between 1971 and 1981. Initially, there was concern about creating a production that was too painful and potentially too traumatising for families and audiences to engage with. It was quickly apparent that the silence surrounding the deaths of children was probably far more damaging to the families of those who had lost a child. Throughout the interviews the play is based upon, contributing families mentioned their perception that while other people who were killed became heroes and icons, the death of a child often slipped into silence and that it impacted feelings of isolation further - that somehow their grief and trauma was not included in the narratives recognising atrocities. The issue, therefore, of long-term and transgenerational trauma also became a key component within the play and in depicting the experience of the fallout of losing a child upon the whole family unit. In most of the six participating families there was a long fight for justice, sometimes to publicly name those who killed the child or with families seeking recognition of the murdered child's innocence. This too became a key part of the storytelling within the play.

What format did the work take and why did you use this approach?

Part 1. Research & the search for participating families March – May 2018: this included meeting support agencies already well established in the field of peace work, familiarising myself with writings on the murder of children throughout the Troubles and accessing participant families. With the help of the Holywell Trust, The Junction, The Pat Finucane Centre (PFC), Tony Doherty and Denis Bradley, the project was eventually able to access six families keen to participate. The underlying reason most families offered as the spur to their participation was a continuing search for justice or to make the public aware of a previous fight for justice in relation to each child's death.

Part 2. Memoir Workshops March – May 2020: a series of memoir workshops (additional to the preparatory work for *The Crack in Everything*). Workshops focussed on story sharing and writing technique. The Northern Ireland conflict was often a key part of the stories that participants chose to tell but it was not always centre stage. Participants were encouraged to find a structure for their writing so that they might continue with the creative process following the series of workshops. Whilst it was valuable sharing and learning for the participants, it brought this writer into the lived lives of individuals in a more holistic sense than is normally represented through wholly focussing on Troubles events. That in turn contributed to the sense of tone, setting and ambience for the ensuing play.

Part 3. Gathering the stories May- June 2018: travelling from Derry to Coleraine, to Belfast, to Mayo, I interviewed over twenty family members and friends. In over 30 hours of recorded speech, the families shared their experience of hearing about/experiencing the child's death, the impact on parents, on siblings and on themselves and the ensuing fight for justice. Additionally, I interviewed Dr Siobhan O'Neill, an academic specialising in trauma awareness in historical and current social settings and in providing access to knowledge around impacts of long-term trauma and transgenerational trauma and Michael Doherty, a long-time negotiator in the peace process.

Part 4. Writing the play July – September 2018: over 30 hours of interviews, were transcribed. With two and half months to create the script, a basic structure needed to be decided upon quickly. I decided to tell the stories consecutively, in the order in which the killings occurred. As each death had its own context it also meant audiences not familiar with the Troubles became aware of the unfolding timeline of the Troubles from 1971-1981. Family voices, gathered individually, were intercut to create the sense of a family offering a collective narrative with their own distinct voice within that so that the delivery was a chorus of voices building on each other's insights and experiences. Each family experience was distilled to 12-15 minutes. The overall script was approximately 90 minutes in duration. Each transcription was cut and pasted into chronological information – as most people jump all over the place with narration. Transcribed narratives were then gathered into six themes:

1. The personality of the child when alive
2. The day of the death
3. The immediate impact on the family
4. The impact on the narrator
5. The fight for justice
6. How the narrator feels about the total experience from today's perspective.

The tense used by interviewees was past-tense. This was shifted to present-tense for the performance script which brings a sense of immediacy to the retelling of lived experience in performance.

Part 5. Script Read-throughs for the six families September 2018: those who gave interviews were asked to sign a permission form permitting their story to be recorded but it was also important that the families sign off on the finished script representing the death of their family member and hopefully suggest amendments, edits, additions etc. Six professional actors rehearsed the pieces over two days and delivered each specific script to each family grouping. Professional counsellors were present to support each family.

Part 6. Casting the production: throughout the process of finding families to take part it became apparent that for families who had experienced great trauma, there is often a family member who uses the arts to express the experience – as seen with the Harkin Family (Darren Harkin, filmmaker), the Feeney Family (Harry Feeney visual artist and writer, Sarah Morrison, BA student), and the Livingstone Family (Charlotte McCurry, actress), all of whom have family members who individually created an artistic response to the death of their family member. From early in the project we were looking for representatives within the families who would carry the family experience by participating in the performance. Participants from the McGavigan Family, Eakin Family and Feeney Family eventually agreed to take part. The other three actors were professional actors but with a past influenced by the Troubles. Therefore, the cast also included Colette Lennon (her uncle was murdered whilst opening up a grocery shop) Damien Hasson (Derry actor whose mother was working in Claudy the day the bomb happened), and Micheal McDaid whose father was an ambulance driver on Bloody Sunday.

Part 7: The Rehearsals: rehearsals took place over 8 weeks. Actors committed to rehearsals on Friday evenings, all-day Saturday and all-day Sunday, plus daily rehearsals the week before the production. Professional counsellors supported the cast throughout. The spaced-out rehearsals served the actors well as those less familiar with learning lines had six weeks to do so. The cast were extremely supportive and committed to each other and to the experiences they were relating. Less experienced performers sought advice from the professional actors and stated that having the professional actors on board offered them a sense of security.

Part 8: The Production: the production used multimedia. Set and lighting design was crafted to reflect pavement, street lighting, street graffiti, old barricade materials such as bikes and prams and boxes of legal files. Projection and sound were major components of the production reflecting images and sounds experienced throughout the years depicted.

Who was involved in the project?

There were 13 participants in the memoir workshops living within a twenty-mile radius of Derry on both sides of the border.

Family members who were interviewed:

- **Damien Harkin's Family:** Mrs Lily Harkin, Briega Harkin, Darren Harkin, Tony Doherty childhood friend, Damien's schoolteacher. and Jimmy Toye who witnessed the death.
- **Annette McGavigan's Family:** May McGavigan, Martin McGavigan and Paul O'Connor (PFC).
- **Kathryn Eakin's Family:** Mark Eakin and family friend Marjorie Leslie.
- **Henry Cunningham's Family:** Robert Cunningham, Herbie Cunningham and Paul O'Connor (PFC)
- **Kathleen Feeney's Family:** Mary Feeney, Danny Feeney and Harry Feeney
- **Julie Livingstone's Family:** Elizabeth Livingstone, Charlotte McCurry, Bernadette Livingstone and Nuala, family friend.

Actors: Sarah Morrison, niece of Kathleen Feeney, Maria McGavigan, niece of Annette McGavigan, Marjorie Leslie, carer for Kathryn Eakin. Collette Lennon, Damian Hasson and Micheal McDaid.

Artists: Conan McIvor, Projection Artist, John Comiskey, Lighting Designer, Alan Farquharson, Set Designer, Garth McConaghie, Sound Artist.

What impact did the project have on you?

The project was on so many levels, a delight to work on. I enjoyed the people taking part on the memoir course. Some of the stories were electrifying and insightful and full of wonderful detail. Some clearly contained major turning points in the narrator's life which imparted deep wisdom. The families of the children killed became very special, firstly because of the immediate trust they brought in sharing their story for a piece of theatre that had no clear outline before they engaged with the project, but also in sharing their vulnerabilities, pain and frustrations so honestly. This was so giving of them after all that had occurred and this generosity impacted upon me in a couple of ways. I was full of fear that I would create a piece of work that patronised or in some way didn't satisfy the families. This eased once I decided on a simple structure for the play. And secondly, I wanted to ensure that nothing on the production side of things would diminish the production. I have experienced in the past a 'relaxed attitude' from production teams to community theatre and I was determined this production would be as slick as possible so that the families and performers would know they got the very best we could give in staging their stories and felt they'd be recognised, heard and validated. I made close friends on the project. The extraordinary journey to create work that connects profoundly with other humans creates a team who have shared a once in a lifetime experience. I'm proud of the work and of the response from the families to the work. I was emotionally shattered, drained and exhausted in the months that followed the production. I wasn't capable of heading into another production and didn't make any theatre work in 2019. This isn't unusual. Large scale, emotionally demanding projects – whilst being incredible – can also be traumatising for the practitioners involved. Immersion in the work can lead to depression, and mental ill-health which can manifest in physical ill-health. I was aware heading into the project that there would be an emotional toll at the end so that it wasn't surprising and I hope I dealt with it as professionally as possible but it is important to note and also to recognise that there is a career and financial cost incurred by having to address this.

Do you feel that involvement with the project has made a difference to the participants?

Yes, I think it did. I don't know how long that difference lasts though. Does it create a window of opportunity for participants to alter something that if not acted upon by a certain time, loses its power? Or does it have long-term impacts? I don't know. I delivered a project on the Shankill in 2013 and it was only last year that I was able to see the real impacts of the work so regarding the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy – I hope the families feel they can continue to speak about the children who died without feeling gagged. Sarah Morrison one of the family/performers wrote her BA on the production of *The Crack in Everything* so that's a very clear example.

What for you was the best thing about the project?

My favourite thing was the response from the families to the production. Two of the families had family members at each one of the eleven performances. Each family was so thrilled at the way their story had been told. One participant said they could never satisfactorily tell their experience as it wandered all over the place, as if the capacity to relate the experience had been blown apart and that the play had pulled all the fragments back together again and created a sense of completeness. I felt a strong sense of this myself as I was finishing the last draft – of untangling something and lassoing it.

What was the audience reaction to the work produced?

Mixed. One person asked why I would want to tell such terrible stories. Another who had worked in the judicial system spoke about feeling guilty. Others too told me they felt guilty, complicit in some way. Some people were upset during the performance – for them it brought the pain of the times back. Younger people got a good sense of the Troubles and were interested in the insights. A lot of people felt the stories were very important and needed to be told. My daughter from Dublin said she had always felt... ‘why don’t they just move on up there?’. Following the play, she said she would never say that again and understood why.

EVALUATION NOTES

Early interviews with Jo Egan evidenced the meticulous care and sensitivity with which a cross-section of subjects was identified, reflecting not just a balance of Protestant and Catholic experience but also a cross-border Donegal Protestant experience (Cunningham). The stories also addressed a wide timespan. The evaluating team was able to observe a number of stages in this process, including initial script readings with three of the families, rehearsals and performances in both Derry and Belfast. Post-performance interviews with audience members and audience questionnaires were also used to gather data. These evidence many of the key points raised by Jo Egan’s account, in particular the range of motivations experienced by the participating families from welcoming new recognition for a neglected story (Harkin) to raising the profile of an existing case that is still being pursued (McGavigan).

Jo Egan, in our interviews with her, highlighted the vital role played by the organisations representing victims and survivors that enabled her to identify and contact family members of the children who had been killed. But also the importance of her being able to follow up independently with participants independently once contact had been made.

The way in which these family histories had influenced younger family members in their own artistic careers was also evident, especially in those actors who participated in the initial script readings for the families. The project therefore contributed to the understanding of gate-keeping and inter-generational memory that have emerged as strong themes in the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy’s work. Another issue that arose was the need to balance the participants’ sense of ownership over their stories with the viewpoints of others represented in the stories, and that compromises are sometimes made.

Jo’s frank account of the emotional demands made on the lead artist in this kind of project also represent a crucial learning outcome, and their support needs of such artists will be considered in more detail in the project findings.

Audience data was more consistently positive than is reported by Jo Egan above – though many audience members reported the deep affect the performance had on them. Especially memorable was the reaction of Kathryn Eakin’s uncle, who in one of the post-show discussions in Belfast spoke about his experience, when as a doctor at Altnagevlin Hospital, he discovered his niece’s body in the hospital morgue. His daughter who was with him that evening informed us that he had not spoken publicly of this before and we were able to refer him to one of the counsellors who were in attendance that evening to support audience members. This episode is emblematic of “the ripple effect” regularly observed throughout the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy programme, where stories told on stage engender other stories within the wider family and audience circles.

“Needed to be slower for those unfamiliar with the events”

“Lack of support for families”

“Very emotional, as I was a witness to Julie Livingstone’s shooting”

“Stories I wasn’t aware of”

“Breathes life into unknown stories”

“I felt a strong sense of my own history”

“At one stage I was more emotional than I have been in 20 years” (Catherine Aiken’s uncle)

“I listened objectively. I did not get carried away”.

“Real stories told by real people... the aftermath of brokenness”

“We need the arts to deal with our legacy”

“Truth suppressed by the British State”

“Maybe three stories would have been enough”

“Too, too long”

“I learnt from the Q&A that victims are forgotten about”

“Well researched. My uncle was killed in Castlerock”

“Production needs to be seen in Westminster”

“I came with an open mind and this caught my attention”

“I grew up in Cork. The Troubles were collectively ignored in the South”.

“I felt uncomfortable, but not in a negative way”

“Impact on families and communities”

“I wondered if the author considered input from those causing the deaths.”

“Similarities between stories”

“Good to have stories from both sides”

“I like to see people being outspoken about what happened. I’m not as involved on an emotional level as much as if I lived in the North”.

“I’m quite young so I felt quite removed from it. But working with the families [as stage manager] has given me more respect for the history and of the long-term impact of what happened. It’s important that we know and respect that history.”

“I was born in 1997 so the stories were new to me. I was struck by the innocence of the subjects and cover-ups and the way victims became used as pawns

“I grew up in that era. I was born in 1962. Looking back there was a lot that people didn’t know. People didn’t listen hard enough to what was happening. I have learned that we have moved on a lot but also to ask questions.”

“There’s a difference between people telling their own story (like Marjorie, and the Theatre of Witness performers) and those telling other people’s stories (even when they are related). There is more emotional resonance when it’s people’s own stories”.

“Most of the older generation are dealt with a second hand.”

“I liked the avoidance of rhetoric so that no-one seeing it would be seeking revenge because if it.”

“I was ashamed I couldn’t remember some of it.”

“There were no lies on that stage tonight”

“We were allowed to think, not told what to think”.

“The families were telling their truth, their way”

“There IS a hierarchy of victims”

BLOOD RED LINES

ROBERT RAE

The second of the larger-scale projects to be performed was written and directed by Robert Rae, a theatre and film director, writer and producer. His professional career began in 1982 working with John McGrath and 7:84 Theatre Company England. From 1986 – 1996 he worked as a freelance director, writer and producer with small and middle scale touring companies and on a number of large-scale community plays. From 1996 to 2014 Robert was Artistic Director & Chief Executive of Theatre Workshop Scotland. He has directed two feature films and numerous professional and community shows.

Robert invited some of his project participants to answer the same questions. Unattributed answers below are Robert's own.

Why did you choose to apply to be involved in the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy Project?

Robert: My professional practice as a theatre and film-maker using a participatory processes and my experience of working with people in and from conflict zones suited the project.

Alan: I had heard of previous Playhouse productions and felt it was a different and innovative way to both empower and tell my story.

Monica: I felt that it would be another way to honour the memory of my husband Tommy who died in Dublin, December 1st 1972. It also gave me the opportunity to interact with victims of the Troubles from the North of Ireland.

Dessie: I didn't choose it exactly – it slowly grew on me. When I saw Robert talking to others, and when we had a chat he listened to me. It was ordinary people like myself. That's why I thought I'd give it a go.

Peter: I was asked to tell the story of my experience/s around a bomb explosion in Dundalk in 1975.

The Project

Blood Red Lines was a project based in Newry – and performed in Newry, Belfast and Dundalk – and subsequently Dublin. It was a cross-border project that addressed the impact of acts of violence that led to loss of life during the Conflict on the lives of those who chose to participate. Given the geographical location both the Border and the activities of the locally based Glennane Gang featured, so consequently families impacted by the Dublin and Monaghan bombs were amongst those invited to participate alongside local people from all communities as well as British soldiers who had served in the area. The participants were self-selecting from a large pool that the project was pitched to and availability over the period of the project was a significant factor for many who chose not to take part.

What format did the work take and why did you use this approach?

Robert: *Blood Red Lines* is an ensemble play with music. Using a three act structure it introduces the participants in their lives before the violent incident, the incident and immediate aftermath, and then the impact upon their lives up to the present day. The stories are interwoven within this structure to help the audience distinguish individual journeys as well as understand the collective impact. I wrote from a series of lengthy individual recorded interviews with each participant, which I then transcribed and edited to create a coherent narrative for the group while respecting the integrity of individual stories. This complex and painstaking task involved taking each story back to the participants on many occasions in order to refine and develop individual narratives that served the whole while ensuring participants remained comfortable and in control of their own story. I staged it in a way that helped an audience distinguish each story as well as dramatizing sections using the full company to bring humour and theatricality to the stage. Tommy Sands wrote songs inspired by the stories which were integrated into the performance during the rehearsal period. The rehearsal period delivered by Kieran Smyth (Community Coordinator) and myself was designed to combine fun activities with more serious explorations of the issues - so building a supportive bond between participants.

Dessie: Right from the very start it was handled with compassion and sensitivity. Very slowly. I didn't feel pressurised into doing anything, but was taken along with individual talks and group talks - just a wee gathering of people. Talking to the rest of the cast over a wee cup of tea I grew in confidence. I was given the space to decide what I wanted to do - my confidence just grew, it was absolutely fantastic.

Monica: it was the first time that I had ever been involved in a drama. *Blood Red Lines* was very sensitively brought along by Robert Rae, Director and Kieran Smyth, Coordinator. It gave me the opportunity to show that the Troubles did not only happen in Northern Ireland and for me to confront my bias towards combatants in the British Army.

Who was involved in your work?

Mary Casey - Jack McCann (60), died Customs Office, Newry - August 1972

Monica Duffy-Campbell - Tommy Duffy (23), died Sackville Place, Dublin - December 1972

Maura Traynor - Pat Molloy (46), died Traynor's Bar, Co. Armagh - February 1974

Aidan Shields - Maureen Shields (46), died Talbot Street, Dublin - May 1974

Tracey Mulholland- Arthur Mulholland (58), died Hayden's Bar, Rock, Pomeroy - February 1975

Dessie Trainer - Dorothy Trainer (51), died People's Park, Portadown - April 1975. Ronald Trainer (17), died Family Home, Portadown - Dec. 1975. Thomas Trainor (30), died Portadown - March 1978

Peter O'Connor - survivor - Kays Tavern, Dundalk - December 1975

Alan Brecknell - Trevor Brecknell (32), died Donnelly's Bar, Silverbridge - December 1975

Paul Reavey - John Martin Reavey (25), died Family Home, Whitecross - January 1976. Brian Reavey (22), died Family Home, Whitecross - January 1976. Anthony Reavey (17), died Family Home, Whitecross - January 1976

Clarke Small - Andrew Small (62), died Hillcrest Bar, Dungannon - March 1976

Lee Lavis - survivor- Operation Rectify, Crossmaglen - April - June 1994

What impact did the project have on you?

Robert: It had a profound impact. As a professional who had already worked with people impacted by conflict, I knew what to expect. My job was to get to know eleven people with harrowing personal stories intimately over a short period of time. At one level I coped by remaining focused and repaying the trust they placed in me by my commitment to making the work the best it could be. I was inspired and supported by the courage, tolerance and genuine warmth of those who chose to participate – cast and crew.

Monica: It had a huge impact on me. I finally felt that I had ‘let go’ of my own personal pain relating to the horror of Tommy’s death. It also helped me to understand/meet and talk in public about all of our experience and the trauma of the Troubles.

Peter: Immense. I can now for the first time talk objectively about the incident and aftermath, and of late (one year on from last performance), I’ve noticed that I suffer far less from the waking dreams and nightmares. It’s almost as if I’ve finally left the bomb scene behind. Though I do look over my shoulder at times. Hearing of other bombings, seeing severely burnt people/animals online/TV still brings back the smell and the sense of guilt.

Alan: It gave me the opportunity to tell my family story in a different way and to think about the affect my father’s killing had not just on me but on my extended family and community. I don’t often have that chance as I work in a support capacity with others who have been bereaved or injured. At first, I didn’t think I would have had the confidence to get on stage and tell my story but with the help and support of the other cast members and the great production team those fears drifted away.

Do you feel that involvement with the project has made a difference to the participants?

Robert: Yes – I hope positively. To combine a good process with a good play is the ambition of my work – not as easy as it sounds!

Alan: I can say it made a difference to me in many ways. For example, more confidence and I can articulate my experience much better. I feel that others were also positively affected - you could see the confidence in people growing over the period of the project.

Dessie: It helped mentally – a lot of people lived in their own wee space, there was no therapy for people during the Conflict – people hadn’t talked about their own experiences. You opened up about things you wanted to get off your chest – that you never even told your own family. You’d just got on with your life. It was definitely helpful - it helped me, my family and the other cast members - without a doubt.

Peter: Yes. At some stage or other, every single participant (survivor) said to me that the play and we as a (new) family was the best therapy that we’d had and though it had cost “buckets of tears” each stated they were glad that they had participated – though most if not all at some point had threatened to back out.

What for you was the best thing about the project?

Robert: The quiet satisfaction of knowing that a difficult job was delivered well was confirmed to me when a daughter of one participant explained that they now understood what their mother had gone through and how that had impacted on their own lives.

Dessie: Telling my story and it getting told the way I wanted it to. I never had an anxious moment saying “no, this isn’t as I want it”, it was perfect. My brother and sisters were saying “I’m proud of you doing that – I couldn’t have done that”. It made me feel happier, and my family could see that and so were happier themselves.

Peter: Finding out I wasn’t alone to be suffering decades after such an event. Finding out a new family that I could commune with, without shame, without fear of guilt, rejection or having to explain myself.

Alan: To see the power of drama as a tool to tell even the most difficult stories and to give them acknowledgement by the production team and then by the audiences.

Monica: Personally, for me, it was to understand that no matter what divide we are from – the pain is the same for all victims caught up in the Troubles.

What was the audience reaction to the work produced?

Robert: *Blood Red Lines* received standing ovations at each and every performance. I’m not best placed to say why or to compare – but I think it was because the stories presented were well told with honesty - and that touches people. I was pleased that the theatricality supported rather than obscured that purpose. Simplicity is often the hardest to achieve.

Peter: Strangely positive. Even one of my school bullies came up to me in tears and shook my hand.

Monica: In every appearance, we got a standing ovation. The audience were visibly moved and surprised at the revelations of our personal pain. It was, for some of us, the opportunity to impart and inform them of the pain and personal suffering of the Troubles. We received a huge amount of appreciation, support and admiration following every performance.

Alan: At each performance there was a standing ovation at the end and many audience members waited about to speak to the cast and give them their support.

Dessie: In Dublin these two women wanted to speak to me after listening to my story. Who am I? Just a wee boy whose mother was murdered. These two sisters – they had this thing in their head that I went through a lot and they just wanted to tell me they’d heard. I’m sure it affected people deeply. There are a lot of people out there who still want to see it.

Blood Red Lines was invited by Justice for The Forgotten to play in Liberty Hall, Dublin in July 2019, and then to the Just Festival in Edinburgh during August 2020. The latter has been postponed until 2021 and will be preceded by a short tour in June/July 2021².

² These additional performances have been organised independently of the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy

EVALUATION NOTES

The evaluation team interviewed Robert Rae before during and after the project period and attended a mid-point rehearsal and performances in Newry, Dundalk and Belfast where interviews were conducted with all but one of the participants. Audience questionnaires were distributed and collected at all venues, but the longer running time of *Blood Red Lines* precluded the use of foyer interviews. Some audience members, however, took up the opportunity which was offered to post or email more considered responses. Lee Lavis also provided questionnaires completed by two members of the Loyalist community which were very positive in response to the performance. Because of concerns expressed about the inclusiveness of the participant selection process, interviews were also conducted with the project partners – The Playhouse, the Holywell Trust and Thomas D’Arcy McGee Trust.

Interviews with Robert Rae highlighted the exceptional demands placed on the lead artists in this kind of project, including the process of first conducting extended interviews (of up to two hours) with each participant he selected and then repeatedly revisiting recordings of their traumatic stories.

Robert acknowledged the importance of the support of Kieran Smyth, the Project coordinator, but also spoke of what he saw as the additional challenges for the Playhouse of managing a Newry-based project at such a remove from the base, especially when *The Crack in Everything* was in also in production.

Interviews with participants consistently bore out the above accounts of how much each felt they had benefitted from the opportunity to share their stories in this way, with many references to the sense of being part of a creative family that had emerged through being part of the project. Many participants also commented on how much the project had meant to their own families, in many cases allowing difficult stories to be shared in detail for the first time.

A distinctive aspect of this project, in the wider context of testimonial theatre, was the inclusion of stories from across the border in Monaghan and Dublin and the involvement of victim and survivor support agencies there. This was in addition to support from the Pat Finucane Centre who already enjoyed a close working relationship with the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy. Alan Brecknell, who works for the Pat Finucane Centre and is used to talking about his father’s death to journalists, spoke to us of the cathartic nature of being involved in this production which gave him the opportunity to understand his father’s full life history. It also deepened his friendship and understanding of fellow cast members with whom he previously enjoyed a purely professional relationship. He doubted that this depth of engagement would have been possible had his story been told for him by a professional actor. He was also very aware of the need to interact sensitively with potential participants whose stories were not included in the production.

Concern was expressed by Project Partners, however, at the under-representation of PUL voices, and the challenges of supporting those whose stories did not feature in the production, some of whom reported feeling as if their stories had been invalidated by not being included. From the perspective of the Thomas D’Arcy McGee Foundation:

Problems with the *Blood Red Lines* project emanated from the lack of clear demarcation of the roles and responsibilities for the local partner, the artist and the project leader team. However, we would note that *Blood Red Lines* was the only project that created tension between the partners. Whilst acknowledging the positive response from the participants in *Blood Red Lines* it is important to point out that they were not ‘self-selecting’.

In good faith the Thomas D’Arcy McGee Foundation engaged with other victims who after meetings and assurances about their feelings and welfare, were rejected by the Director, adding to their hurt and limiting the involvement of the Protestant, unionist community and loyalist community (PUL). The Thomas D’Arcy McGee Foundation involved many of its cross border and cross community contacts, built up over several years, in identifying and arranging delicate meetings with forgotten victims. These relationships were damaged.

As it was, the scale of the production was very ambitious, with a much longer running-time and greater number of participants than in other Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy projects. Because of the need for unrestricted access to the rehearsal space, the rehearsal conditions in Newry were far from ideal – taking place, despite the serious reservations of the local Project Partner, in a semi-derelict building – but the commitment of the participants and their readiness to move out of their comfort-zone in workshop activities was clear in the rehearsals we observed, as was the careful process of consultation that Robert Rae engaged in with each participant.

The technical demands of the production were also ambitious, with extensive use of lighting, amplified sound and video projection. The elaborate set was sometimes difficult for participants to negotiate and some struggled to remember lines, relying heavily on the prompter, but the audience seemed generally to be forgiving of these problems.

At the Dundalk performance one of the audience members we spoke to was John Reavey, the son of Paul Reavey – a film student – who has subsequently made a short film about his family story, inspired in part by his father’s participation in *Blood Red Lines*.

What the audience said they saw, heard, felt, thought and learned:

NEWRY

“I have known one of the performers all my life and never realised”

“They deserve to be compensated”

“Beautiful people”

“Families still waiting for justice”

“The hurt and pain people suffered because of the British Army”

“The truth about collusion”

“It was at its best when people spoke naturally, not struggling to remember poorly rehearsed lines”

“PFC [Pat Finucane Centre] give people a voice”

“How little I really understood. I had forgotten many of the names”

“I saw real people dressed in their normal clothes. I saw pictures on a backdrop which backed up the stories being told.”

“I heard very naturally told stories of what happened to loved ones. I heard real emotion in the voices. I heard anger, sadness, humour and loss. I heard supporting songs.”

“I thought that the actors were very real. Their individual stories were truly their own. Some were more confident in their delivery than others and I liked that.”

“I thought that a number of the cast would benefit personally from the experience of telling the story. Some cast members may not benefit. Unfortunately, some of the stories were overly long and protracted”



“I felt a mixture of things. I felt great sympathy for the characters and was very moved by the long-term impact of the deaths on their future lives. I felt they had accomplished a great thing and were very courageous!”

“I felt the production lacked balance for the community. No voice from the Unionist/ Loyalist community who would have similar stories to tell. I felt this was a serious weakness. I also thought the play was too long!”

“I have to admit I felt a bit guilty for thinking that the actors were wallowing in their own grief. Are they now ‘defined’ by their victim stories. The son/daughter grandchild of the victims! But maybe that’s what theatre should do – disturb the audience? Comfort the afflicted (cast) afflict the comfortable (audience)”

“A great achievement for an amateur cast!”
 “Personal stories are stronger than statistics”

“People from different backgrounds”
 “Hurt and hope”

BELFAST

"I've lost friends to the conflict"

"Interesting to hear the perspective of a British soldier"

"My own grief coming up"

"An important form of therapy and reconciliation"

"Proud of my friend"

"These questions are too 'arty' " (in response to questionnaire)

"We all have our own part to play to embrace change"

"Performers have done their families proud"

"I saw my life on stage"

"Confronted the hatred of the paras"

"Important work of the PFC"

"State mechanisms are important, but community initiatives make reconciliation, healing and communication possible"

"The most honest, raw, real performance I have ever watched."

"Leaders of our world should watch this"

"I wish the Assembly, Secretary of State, could see this"

"Perpetrators of violence should see the damage their actions caused"

"Some stories seemed to retraumatise the tellers, it is the director's responsibility to ensure their cast is ready to perform"

"I'm not sure why an expensive video wall was used as a backdrop as there was only one moving image"

"The production was so professional"

"As a young person born after the GFA it was an invaluable look into what has passed."

"United group of brave people"

"Dublin bombing brought a lot back"

"While I am all for verbatim theatre, it does require some judicious and sensitive editing to provide some form and structure"

"11 stories were perhaps too many"

DUNDALK

"I saw what we lived through"

"Should be in every school"

"Ordinary folk making stories come to life"

"Together we survive, together we share, together we walk forward"

"People from outside N.I. had no idea"

"Futility of conflict"

"It all started because unionists didn't want nationalists to get their Human Rights"

"I was so affected by the performance, I had to return a second time"

"I heard a British soldier say they were told to kill"

"Courageous bunch of amateurs"

"So many families were hurt, not only mine"

"The importance of not forgetting"

"There is no hierarchy of victims"

FIRST RESPONSE

AILIN CONANT

Ailin is a Japanese-American director with a passion for daring new works of theatre that engage audiences with untold and under-told stories in a visual, visceral way. Her Colchester-based company, Theatre Témoins, has worked in collaboration with The Salisbury Playhouse, Ovalhouse, Roundhouse, GDIF, and others. Ailin has worked extensively with vulnerable adults and young people in contexts of conflict. She has worked freelance for The Playhouse's *First Response* and for various companies including The Bush Theatre, Yellow Earth, and Theatre503 (all UK), Ayyam Al-Masrah (Gaza), Clown Me In (Mexico, Lebanon, and Sweden), The Catalyst (Switzerland), and Satellite Théâtre (Montreal), and has produced work through Témoins in Rwanda, Israel, Kashmir, Lebanon, France, and the USA.

Why did you choose to apply to be involved in the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy Project?

The project was steeped in the same ethos that guides all of my work – bringing imagination and creativity to our most difficult collective experiences and questions.

Can you tell us about the project that you led up? What issues did your work address?

I directed *First Response* which was a devised theatre project that brought together a group of first responders who had attended events during the Troubles to create a play together. We had over 30 incredible first responders of all kinds – from priests to undertakers to youth workers to the more traditional “frontline first responders” come together in workshops and interviews, and in the end 8 stayed on to rehearse and bring their stories, conversations, and ideas to life onstage. We were also joined by a fab crew of 9 young people from Ulster University Drama Department and so the piece became a really fascinating shared space of intergenerational conversation. It was a very rich and rewarding project.

What format did the work take and why did you use this approach?

I'm a devising director which means that I don't impose a script, but as much as possible try to facilitate it emerging organically from the rehearsal process. The two beliefs that sit at the bottom of this methodology are: 1) the fact that our relationship to our own memories and experiences is fundamentally changed by the creative act, and our ability to reimagine and reform our own experiences to create art, and 2) having several creative minds on a task is much better than having just one. The art that comes out of a devised process is unique in that it belongs to no one and everyone; it is bigger than anything any one of us could have dreamed up; it is somehow bigger than the sum of its parts.

Who was involved in your work?

In a devised project, the “who” and the “what” are synonymous. Your project is nothing without the “who”. Those who shared their stories in *First Response* included:

Chris, a former television news cameraman

Felicity, a former news journalist

Jim, retired firefighter

Lesley, a retired police officer

Liz, a lecturer in nursing

Robert, a former paramedic

Stephen, a retired police officer

Ursula, retired nurse

They were joined on stage by **Aine, Caoilfhinn, Codie, Darcy, Ruairi, Shauna and Shannon**, drama students from the University of Ulster

What impact did the project have on you?

I came away with a deeper appreciation for the complexities of Northern Ireland – and the job of a first responder, and I also came away with many new friends. The friends are the most important bit.

Do you feel that involvement with the project has made a difference to the participants?

Most have said so, yes. We all still Zoom or meet up regularly, it’s really incredible to see how the group have come together into a little family, especially considering the context. This was a cross-community project working with people who had all been exposed to much more than their fair share of trauma due to their work. It wasn’t a “happy little family” at the beginning. This took time and felt all the more powerful when it did develop for the rocky road we had to take to get there.

What for you was the best thing about the project?

The people, the relationship – all glimpsed in the tiny things that won’t make any sense to anyone who wasn’t there.

What was the audience reaction to the work produced?

I think there was a sincere appreciation for the intergenerational aspect of the production and ensuing conversation. Perhaps because it was what was most “new” or “unique” about this production, which sat in a lineage several past testimony-based retrospective cross-community projects.

EVALUATION NOTES

One outcome of the interim evaluation of Phase 1 of the project was for the Project Partners to set clearer thematic guidelines for the remaining two major projects, which were to address the experience of first responders and the year 1972. Ailin Conant was appointed to create a performance on the former theme, and following the scoping process, participants were identified with background in nursing, the fire service and journalism.

The group also included two police officers and, in the focus group meeting for all the participants held after the first performance, it was generally acknowledged that their experience was different from the other participants because – as one focus group member put it – “ they couldn’t feel safe when they returned home at the end of the working day”.

The group also referred to the heightened sensitivities around first meetings when police were involved, both from the point of view of the police participants who would have preferred advance notice of who would be in the room, and from that of the other participants who would have preferred knowing in advance that police officers would be involved.

In the event, all participants agreed that through the process a great sense of mutual trust had been developed, to the extent that they felt able to air their earlier concerns in the focus group meetings. It was agreed, however, that for future projects clearer rules of engagement around advance disclosure of participants would be welcomed. The group did not feel that this would have inhibited them from engaging.

In periodic interviews with Ailin Conant, she spoke about the challenge of what she described as a tacit set of assumptions about how her project should develop. This had not been made clear prior to her appointment and required her to significantly adapt her working methods. She was used to a devised process, but there was pressure from the organizers for her to move quickly towards a fixed script, and an assumption that the performance would consist of a number of discrete stories, whereas she wanted to achieve a single narrative structure.

But she came to see how the resolution of these apparent tensions came to serve the process. Her Lecoq training inclined her towards a physical theatre method in which allusive imagery could stand for more explicit facts. It soon became clear to her, however, that the participants were more comfortable with more traditional story-telling, so she brought students from the University of Ulster into the process with the intention of providing a physical complement to the verbal narrative. This allowed an overall narrative arc to be developed, with a backdrop of symbolic boxes which symbolised stories that has still to be told, only some of which were opened during the performance.

An example given by one of the participants illustrates the visceral power of this symbolism. How heavily or lightly he set down a box in which a hidden story was held was entirely dependent on his emotional state in that moment of performance. Like the sense memory referred to in one of the recordings used in the performance of the speaker’s continuing aversion to polystyrene fragments which had filled the street after the Omagh bomb, Ailin managed to retain a strong non-verbal dimension to the production.

As one of the participants put it, what began with the idea of using the students as a sounding board for the historic stories being told became a deeply meaningful dialogue, so that the students’ questioning of what they were seeing related on stage seemed not naïve or belligerent, but a means of allowing the participants to re-evaluate their stories from the fresh perspective of the younger generation.

“The young people had to sit and listen to our stories and I could see horror in their faces”

“What started as a conversation morphed into acting and story-telling and back again to conversation”

“We have all melded together as a family”

“I came to realise how strong I am personally. I was too scared to tell my own story. I’ve come to love myself” (student)

It was, in the end, this intergenerational dialogue that was identified by both the younger and older participants, and in audience questionnaires and post-show discussions, as among the most meaningful outcomes of the production.

Alongside an acknowledgement of the absence of mental health support for first responders during the Troubles, and the value of them unpacking the symbolic boxes that comprised the stage set of their unshared stories, the need to value equally the problems faced by the younger generation was also acknowledged.

One memorable moment in the first post-show discussion was when the final question came from the mother of an autistic child to one of the student cast who had spoken in the performance of his own experience of autism. A strong recommendation in the cast discussion was that a future Playhouse project could address the pressures faced by young people today.

Asked to identify what she has learnt from the production, Ailin focussed on the challenge of managing the interpersonal dynamics within a creative team with so many intense and sometimes conflicting experiences. In the cast discussion, it was suggested that sometimes her lack of pre-existing knowledge of the local situation led her to allowing some sensitive discussions to go too far. But these differences clearly also drove much of the creative process, with the avoidance of trigger words being used as a device for assimilating differing perspectives.

One such word was “truth” as an acknowledgement that this kind of process can throw up a number of contradictory and firmly held alternative truths. Teya Sepinuck, the director of the Theatre of Witness, has written of the need to “hold the paradox” as a way of explaining the need to accommodate such conflicting perspectives within the same creative process.

But Ailin takes a more robust approach to this dilemma. ‘“You speak, I speak, we agree two stories” is not enough’, she says. ‘They have to talk’. Above all else, she seeks to avoid “victim narratives”. ‘Participants engage in the process as creators. They valorise their own contribution through their creativity. “We are fabulous not because of our stories, but because of how well we tell them”’. The need to collectively resolve the tensions between stories made the process stronger. It was the piece itself that allowed everyone to mediate their differences.

What the audience said they saw, heard, felt, thought, learnt...

The audience response reflected the intense emotions underpinning the story-telling and also picked up on the telling symbolism of the boxes in the set. As with other Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy performances, a strong empathetic connection between audiences and participants was evident, with a few acknowledging their lack of engagement. But the inter-generational theme emerged strongly in audience feedback.

Many one-word responses: stories, drama, trauma, truth, sorrow, love, hope, respect, togetherness, grief, sadness, happiness, humanity, honesty, pain, forgiveness, compassion, bravery, courage, inspiration, regrets, emotion, integrity, vulnerability, authenticity, remorse, dialogue, fear, care, understanding, connection

“Emotional, yet a sense of identity that everyone’s stories were part of my country’s history”

“That our schools and educational system don’t teach us enough. I have learnt that I have so much to learn”

“History, looking forward to the future”

“How people were affected by the Troubles and how present generation feel that history is constraining them at present”

“History is important in order to learn for the future”

“The truth of what happened then”

“Very moving and disturbing my preconceptions of that time in history”

“Unanswered questions about what happened”

“Two generations communicating honestly”

“Stories of truth told without drama (in a good way!)”

“Impacted forcefully in the heart, soul and mind”

“That talking really does help”

“Fantastic description of the trauma experienced by the actors. Loved the young students from Magee. Well done.”

“My own experience through the Troubles”

“The trauma of those that made our lives easier”

“People who died, helped and lived for others”

“The truth without the politics, which was the lives of the majority who were unheard”

“I felt those on stage gave an insight that has not been given a voice”

“That we need this”

“The courage of the participants”

I thought that the power of truth was jumping off the stage! To hear people articulate very “Personal and traumatic experiences was hugely impactful”

“I felt humbled by what I was watching”

“I think the process as a whole demonstrated how powerful theatre can be as a medium for dealing with our past in a safe space and in a dignified and respectful manner.”

“The diversity of human suffering and the glimpse of hope in fragility”

“To respect and grow within all generations”

“Intensity – captures this very well”

“Stories that I may not otherwise have heard”

“Very impactful emotionally”

“To be open to narratives from the past to understand the present”

“Everybody has their own trauma”

“People’s bravery, suffering and trauma. Hope and inspiration for the future”

“The past being relived. Real life stories, bravery and emotion, hurt and love”

“So emotional, well done to the actors, very brave heroes, Your message of hope was inspiring”

“Back to the Troubles that I lived through. No turning back. Live for the future together”

“There is hope through listening to each other. Giving our children a better to live in present”

“Powerful – opinions from both past and present”

“Emotional – such bravery from those during those times and courage from those who have suffered since”

“We will never truly understand the trauma from that time, and hope we will never have to now or ever again”

“How senseless war is. The suffering people went through”

“Sad, the actors are so courageous. Hurt.”

“To respect people no matter of colour, creed, race, gender, that we never have to experience this again”

“I saw real people and real emotion. Love compassion”

“I heard a story I know told a different way from different perspectives. I heard hurt, pain, love, emotion”

“I thought it was an excellent performance of the different viewpoints from real people doing their best in horrific circumstances. I heard young people’s opinions”

“Good to look at different perspectives”

“It brought back the past and what we accepted as normal”

“It was amazing and very real. I was on Bloody Sunday and what we chose to forget”

“The way ahead! The future has hope!”

“I’ve seen a story, a conversation between first responders and the new generation who try (on their turn) to understand what happened. Because all the directions and barricaded. In the end it seems like both sides meet. Bravo!”

“Good music and sound effects. I’m from the Netherlands and sometimes have difficulties understanding the performers. It feels like the kids in the play have the same difficulties understanding the adults, are they speaking the same language”

“I think this was an amazing play and it gave a me a better understanding of the whole Troubles”

“The effect the Troubles had on ordinary people’s lives”

“Real stories of the Troubles”

“Very good performance should be taken nationwide”

“So important to stage and hear this work”

“To listen as much as possible, to understand what happened and to live life in the present”

“As an outsider who grew up watching the media, I really appreciate the accounts from those who lived through the Troubles “

“Great devices and mix of light and shade themes”

“Very moving. Lovely mix of generations. Good use of theatrical devices. Subtle performances from individuals”

“Compelling story-telling, regret, the sense of urgency”

“That nurses are unsung heroes at war. That trauma has a place in art”

“Truth, honesty, stories that need to be heard

“So lovely to see this is cross-generational. This needs to tour! There is a new generation that needs to understand and this is one of the best ways. I have seen this happen”

“Please, this needs to tour”

“The passing of the Troubles to the younger generation. An awful lot of learning for those receiving”

“Horrific stories with some hope – the strength of human endurance”

“Should go on tour around Ireland”

“It’s good to remember but also good to move forward”

“Individual stories of PTSD, learning for younger generation”

“Neutral. Am worried that I didn’t feel much. Am I too used to hearing stories from conflict? Don’t want to belittle or undermine any of the courageous people who so bravely told their stories”

“It’s amazing and very interesting to hear those stories”

“How it affected their lives and how it can change yours”

“Dynamics between adults and next generation. The secrets we think will protect but need to be told”

“More of this kind of therapy is required here”

“Many emotions – the need for more drama type therapy – it is one of the best therapies in my opinion. Excellent and powerful”

“Very interested in the young people’s responses/reactions to the Troubles”

“Voices that are intergenerational and powerful”

“That everyone has a story”

“I saw the people of this country speaking what has to be spoken and we heard it loud and clear”

“I heard the inside story and the pain that you rarely hear so directly”

“I felt that this is incredible power and hope that can be accessed and passed on to so many others that really need it”

“That we are not forever caught or imprisoned by the past – each one to work it out”

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate... our greatest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is not our darkness but our light that threatens us”

“I saw a generational exchange of perceptions between the first responders and the young people”

“I heard the opening of boxes, the alchemical transformation of pain into love and solidarity”

“I think this is an important new corner to turn, to see how lived experience first responders interacted with the young dramatists”

“I learned that there are always new insights to be gained by new ways of story-telling”

“Amazing people bravely telling their own story”

“The story needs told more often”

“It brought memories from experience in my own town of Lockerbie. Anger I felt towards the press then changed to understanding”

“Arts is a strong way of connecting”

“I felt my country’s histories and wounds (Columbia). I felt I want to go back to keep working on memory and justice”

“It is important to honour everyone’s stories”

ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN

DAMIAN GORMAN

Damian Gorman was born in Newcastle, County Down. He has written extensively for television, radio and the stage. He has also worked – with David Barker – as a documentary film-maker and as a writer with many community groups in Northern Ireland. Gorman's stage plays include *Broken Nails* (winner of four Peacock Ulster Theatre Awards), *Loved Ones* and *Sometimes* (Nominated for Best Production in the 1998 Belfast City Council Awards). Gorman was awarded the Stewart Parker Playwright Award and in 1998 received an MBE for services to the arts. He was among three Northern Irish writers to be honoured with a Major Individual Artist Award by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in 2006. Damian was founding director of 'An Crann/ The Tree' in the 1990s, a project which worked to help people tell, and hear, the stories of the 'Troubles' when they were still undeniably with us.

Why did you choose to apply to be involved in the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy Project?

I have worked at the shoulders of people telling their stories of living through conflict for the guts of 30 years.

Can you tell us about the project that you led up? What issues did your work address?

I researched and wrote a play in the Theatre of Witness tradition. *Anything Can Happen: 1972 – Voices from the Heart of the Troubles* is founded on testimonies from the worst year of the Troubles. Part of my remit was to gather 6 or 7 people who would be prepared to carry their stories onto a stage, and into the company of strangers, for the first time. The issue we have tried to address is how massively important such stories are – in a place like ours – as connective human tissue. The main issue for me was to treat the participants, who were gifting their life experiences to the project, properly at all times: to be led by that principle in everything.

What format did the work take and why did you use this approach?

Much of the work took the format of having cups of tea and caramel squares with potential (and then actual) participants. Building the ground and building the relationships on which anything good could be made. I also realised early on that, for my particular theatre of witness piece, I needed to make a character up – someone to be played by a professional actor. I needed to do this to ensure I had some way of ensuring the piece as a whole had “air pockets” in it, sufficient to keep the intensity and truthfulness of the witness bearable at all times for everyone.

Who was involved in your work?

RICHARD MOORE who was blinded by a rubber bullet in May 1972 as a ten-year-old boy. Richard has gone on to do many remarkable things including founding an international charity and befriending the soldier who blinded him.

VICTORY MONTGOMERY who was a teenage DJ in 1972, and has a remarkable story of a contribution made by his father, a UDR man, in the wake of Bloody Sunday. In later years Victor lost two brothers – one killed by the IRA, and one by his own hand.

HAZEL DEENY was a young child in 1972. Born and reared in the Protestant community, she met and married Trevor on his release from prison for offences committed as a member of the UVF. Two days before the Good Friday Agreement was signed, ending the longest phase of the Troubles, Trevor was shot dead beside her. He was buried on the day of the signing itself. Her story describes both the killing and its aftermath in forensic, human detail.

SIOBHAN LIVINGSTONE was born and reared in Creggan, Siobhan felt obliged to leave her home, and her home country, because of something which she witnessed during 1972; something which she could not accept being done in her name, and the name of people like her.

TOM KELLY is a founding member of the internationally-acclaimed Bogside Artists, Tom has been centrally involved with illuminating a series of walls in the Bogside with “The People’s Gallery”, telling the story of how that community experienced the conflict. His work is profoundly influenced by his Christian faith.

SUSAN STANLEY was in her mother’s womb when her teenage brother was killed by a bomb in Belturbet Co. Cavan at the end of 1972. But although she never walked the same ground as her brother, her life, and the lives of her family, have been deeply affected by his death and the manner of his death.

PAT LYNCH is a professional actor (who also has his own 1972 story). He plays a very significant role in the piece as The Caretaker.

What impact did the project have on you?

I’m still immersed in it – still being impacted by it, so it’s a question for another day. But I consider it the most important single piece of work I’ve been involved with. It reaffirms, and strengthens, my belief in the power, even the healing power, of stories shared from the heart.

Do you feel that involvement with the project has made a difference to the participants?

I know it. In the sense that they have – they all have – said so very clearly.

What for you was the best thing about the project?

Meeting and working with the people.

What was the audience reaction to the work produced?

We don’t know yet. Although there has been a hugely positive response to our filling of empty chairs (chairs in the theatre empty because of COVID-19 restrictions) with mementoes – objects which call to mind loved ones lost because of the Troubles (and other things).

EVALUATION NOTES

Planned for production in March 2020, the unavoidable postponement of the performances until September because of the Covid crisis and the move to an online performance format inevitably changed the nature of this project. It is to the credit of all involved, that the production was successfully mounted online and accessed on multiple social media platforms including Youtube and Facebook both on the nights of performance and as an archive recording.

The theme of 1972 presented obvious challenges for Damian Gorman as the lead artist, as many key witnesses would now be of advanced age. He adopted a broad approach to the theme, however, which as a pivotal date in the history of the Troubles, cast a long shadow.

In our first interview in December 2019 Damian was clear about the importance of looking after both the participants and the audiences and not shifting their weight of the stories from one to the other. He was also aware of the challenge of finding suitable participants who had not already been involved in a similar process before.

Because of his long association with peacebuilding in Northern Ireland, particularly through An Crann, Gorman had a wide network of contacts to draw on, as well as potential participants referred by the Project Partners and other organisations. Because he had stronger links with the Catholic Community, he spent more time in the scoping period making connections with the Protestant community. But he was concerned at accessing people who were not members of existing groups.

To this end he offered writing workshops, which one of the programme's Local Artists, Anne Crilly found very beneficial. Damian also found one of his project participants this way. He also advertised two open meetings in the Playhouse which attracted a much larger response than he had anticipated. By the time of our first meeting he had identified ten possibilities – all of whom knew that the final selection depended on the balance of stories in terms of gender and background. But he was nonetheless anxious about the potential need to inform some of those who had expressed interest for fear of seeming to invalidate their stories.

Like Ailin, Damian understood the need to create a narrative structure to link the selected stories together. He therefore introduced the idea of the Caretaker, a narrator who would help integrate the individual stories together, as well as fulfilling a caretaking role for the audience by lightening the mood of the performance. This caretaker was in charge of the space where the storytellers were preparing their performances and through the ingenious device of having him pick up seemingly discarded drafts of unused stories and reading them aloud, he was also able to represent some of those whom Damian had spoken to who had chosen not to commit to a full performance role. His speech impediment underlined the fact that he spoke for those reluctant to speak for themselves – but he also represented those who preferred not to have their stories told at all. The core participants each had 12 minutes to explain the impact of 1972 on their lives and their subsequent history.

The performance itself took place on a meticulously detailed set designed by Ciaran Bagnall to evoke memories of the 1970s and included a large screen for the projection of video imagery prepared by Conan McIvor. Richard Moore preferred not to perform live each evening and chose to have his contribution pre-recorded and projected on the screen. But he made a surprise appearance at the end of every performance playing the guitar to accompany the song by Local Artists coordinator, Liam Campbell, which provided the production with a stirring finale.

The director, Kieran Griffiths – who was familiar with the Theatre of Witness model – understood the need to balance the central function of witnessing with a robust theatrical element including sight and sound, with specially composed music by Brian O’Doherty. It was important to him that everything was done by permission of the participants, and he encouraged them to think of each performance as an act of discovery. He took the transition to an online format in his stride, seeing the camera lenses as additional sets of eyes. In performance, the presence of mementoes of lost loved ones, which were provided by members of the general public gave the performers a sense of connection with their audience and the occasional use of an onstage camera gave the online audiences an unusual performers’ eye point-of-view.

Interviews with three of the participants conducted during the run of performances confirmed the sense in which they felt cared-for by the production team, especially in the face of understandable first-night nerves. There was a clear desire to perform the piece afresh each night rather than rely on a pre-recorded version. This maintained the sense of liveness in each performance.

Victor, who had become involved because he knew people from the Protestant community were more reluctant to engage in this kind of work, spoke of his family’s positive reaction to hearing his story in a way they had not done before. Susan also spoke of the importance of the support of her son and her siblings, one of whom watched the performance from Australia. It was because of her that Susan had wanted the seats of the auditorium to be filled with the memories of the bereaved. For her, the performance was about a continuing search for accountability for her brother’s death.

According to Siobhan, she got involved by accident. She was one of Damian’s writing group. “Damian was low-key. He wasn’t selling it. It was just a casual conversation.” She said yes without really knowing what she was getting involved with. She found the project a slow and nurturing process. Damian wanted it to be her words, not his words. “I heard my own voice back. Nothing dramatic happened to me but I do absolutely know how abnormal our normality was. This war went on so long and not enough people suffered. For most it was more than bearable. In between the bombs and the murders and the shootings we had fun. The barricades were where we went for some craic. Unless you were involved you don’t remember all the deaths. We need to investigate what allowed the war to go on. This project has an educational purpose. What is the point of uncovering something is you can’t help it heal?”

Tom had known Damian, whom he describes as “one of the good guys”, for a long time, having been involved in documentaries about the Bogside for An Crann. “I didn’t feel pressured to say yes right away but the play allowed me to speak about the end result of the Bogside murals which were about hope and the future. The Bogside artists have maintained their independence for 25 years. That cost us and our families because we weren’t prepared to be infiltrated by promises of help.” Of the process with Damian, he says: “I can’t think of anyone else who would have let me tell my story”. He is hopeful that the project may lead to a longer association with the Playhouse as custodians of the Bogside murals.

An interview was conducted with Ursula McHugh, a Cognitive Behavioural Therapist, who has a long association with the Playhouse (where she has had an office since 2011) and a keen interest in drama. She has a firm belief in the therapeutic value of theatre and runs the “Creative Path” programme – a form of social prescribing. She has been the resident counsellor for the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy for the final two projects. With a strong interest in performance, Ursula was concerned that participants did not feel that just because they were involved with the Academy that they need counselling or therapy – just that she was available. But she also wanted them to feel supported throughout the process.

THE LOCAL ARTISTS

PAMELA BROWN

Why did you choose to apply to be involved in the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy Project?

The prospect of creating a 'narrative archive' with outcomes demonstrating how creative writing and the production of podcasts (with an accompanying publication) promotes understanding, empathy and reconciliation. The opportunity to work with The Playhouse and develop skills as an artist within the project remit was also central.

The Project

Methodology included:

- An initial meeting with the Project co-ordinator to determine which group was suitable for the Question of Legacy project.
- Once the WAVE Injured Group were selected, I was able to conduct research and prepare for the recordings.
- An initial meeting was held with the individual participants in Belfast to give a project overview.
- A selection of poems was used as a springboard for discussion. This discussion centred on devising the legacy questions from the poetry content. Two sources were: Primo Levi's 'The Survivor' and a contemporary piece by a son writing about his father having lost a leg due to a punishment beating. The participants' responses to both poems was extraordinary and insightful. These questions gave structure to the project.
- A further workshop session dealt with selecting the questions on the past, present, and future. There were 36 questions in total – two for each participant in each category.
- While the participants knew all the questions, the ones they answered were selected at random during each interview, ensuring a spontaneous response.
- I made a decision that the interviews would be peer-led therefore pairing-off the participants to interview each other. This was primarily because the participants were aware of the nuances of each other's stories. Therefore, they could draw out essential detail during the recordings.
- Recording of podcasts are based on the interviews with participants.
- Transcribing the podcast for the accompanying book.
- Composition of music for podcasts was in conjunction with the local composer Connor Kelly.
- Discussion and design of podcast booths was in conjunction with the project manager and designer, Phil Ruddock.

What format did the work take and why did you use this approach?

I spent a week at the WAVE Trauma Centre (Belfast) with Connor Kelly, composer of the music. It was vital that he attend the interviews to get a sense of the participants, for the creation of the music. He was also recording the podcasts. By using poetry and discussion, we devised an overall list of thirty-six questions. Twelve from the past, twelve from the present, and twelve about the future. There were six participants, even though it was a collective decision in the creation of the questions.

No participant knew which question they would be asked. I decided that the group should peer interview. They knew each other; knew each other's stories and would know how to draw out the communication that was vital for the podcasts. The participants paired off, and the questions were selected at random by themselves from cards. I used this approach because my own voice 'didn't belong' in this project. This wasn't my story to tell, nor could I ever give voice to the words spoken in the podcasts and the level of passionate credibility that each participant expressed.

Who was involved in your work?

All members of WAVE Injured Group, Belfast and civilians who were injured during the Troubles.

- **Jennifer McNern** was injured on 4th March 1972, was injured by a no warning bomb in the Abercorn Restaurant in Belfast City Centre. She lost both her legs and had other serious fractures.
- **Alex Bunting** was blown up on 21st October 1991. He lost his left leg, and sustained injury to his right leg from shrapnel injuries caused by the bomb that was planted underneath his taxi while out working.
- **Mark Kelly** was caught up in a no warning bomb explosion in the Glen Inn, Glengormley on the 28th August 1976. As a consequence, he is a bilateral amputee of the lower limbs, losing one leg below the knee and the other above the knee. His other injuries were burns, shrapnel, and a compound fracture of the femur, hearing loss and lung damage.
- **Margaret Yeaman** was in work in an estate agents in Banbridge on 15th March 1982. There was a no-warning car bomb. Margaret lost her sight.
- **Peter Heathwood** was attacked by two loyalist gunmen from the UFF who entered his North Belfast home and shot him after a struggle on 27th September 1979. His father died of a heart attack at the scene. Peter is a T-6 incomplete paraplegic and uses a wheelchair from that day onwards.
- **Paul Gallagher** was injured on 6th January 1994. His home was taken over by four gunmen who shot him six times. He sustained damage to his lung, lost his spleen and sustained a fractured femur. One bullet hit his spine leaving him paralysed.

Their voices are taken from before and after these direct encounters with war – in the beginning of a day's work, having a cup of coffee, or sitting at home with family watching TV. The ordinary flow of reality is shattered by the hyper-reality of violence, and their voices take us on their journeys to endure beyond hate, existing and living with their extreme injuries and the chaos; finding new life, humour, and approximating 'normality' with perseverance and fortitude.

What impact did the project have on you?

The opportunity to work with this group of people and record their stories was a transforming experience. When I devised this project, I couldn't have anticipated the outcomes nor realise how important the project would become for me. We all go about our day-to-day lives, and while we face challenges, we cannot imagine the challenges faced by people who are disabled. As a writer, I'm always thinking about the importance of words, how they are used, how you demonstrate tone of voice. Words are not merely a two-dimensional pattern on a page and the linguistic facet was a vital part of the WAVE Trauma project because the voices of the stories can be heard in their gentle intensity. This was a truly insightful project. Stories, comments, anecdotes, struggles, hopes, fears, honesty, compassion and many things stood out: notably the lack of bitterness and the all-encompassing humanity that the group had for all people in their communities. Everybody is part of their community and they make no distinctions.

Do you feel that involvement with the project has made a difference to the participants?

The experiences and stories shared by this group, show how the people who speak the loudest have not always the most important thing to say, and if we want to learn about each other – about our differences, our vulnerability and our ability to be compassionate, to really care about each other in conflict – then the voices of these survivors are a guide for society seeking to advance the peace process. The collective experience of these interviews gave the participants a collective platform while sharing their individual voices. One seismic psychological benefit of the interviews is that you touch people who are seriously injured to the extremes of blindness, paraplegic and bilateral amputations. Their arresting voices lead you to contemplate their long years of patience, endurance, suffering, distress and hardship. These podcasts also give the participants something to share with people who they meet as they go forward with their campaigns for equality, justice, welfare claims and recognition as innocent civilians seriously injured during the conflict.

What for you was the best thing about the project?

Providing a platform for the participants to tell their stories. The project outcomes went way beyond my expectations. I've worked as a community artist for (almost) 30 years, I've always advocated the role that the artist must play in providing a platform for our social history, our real history, and ultimately a conversation about the world we inhabit.

What was the audience reaction to the work produced?

Audience reaction was overwhelmingly positive. People who listened to the podcasts were deeply moved by the content and in meeting may of those whose voices created it.

JOE CAMPBELL

Why did you choose to apply to be involved in the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy Project?

For a while now my art has been about my own personal experience of the Troubles which lasted a long time. As I've aged, my focus naturally has become more hind-sighted – with a better view of things from higher ground. I found this process not only helped me, but also, initiated a process of healing. The project struck me as a good vehicle to widen the scope of my art and to seek ways to encourage this process in others. There's little doubt, in my mind at least, that the whole business of addressing legacy issues here in Northern Ireland has been problematic. Segregation breeds not just paranoid reactions but also, inaction. It's about holding cultural ground. It's about entrenchment, and, like all trench warfare, can only be breached by fresh thinking and innovation. It was the opportunity to further use the creative process using the motivations above that drew me to the Theatre & Peace Building Theatre Academy.

The Project

The project I led was the creation of a graphic novel entitled *Peacemakers* featuring the stories of a number of significant 'peacemakers' of the Northern Irish Troubles. What I sought were significant life lessons and experience from those who were directly involved in the opposite of conflict – those who sought to provide support and social justice for victims. I also sought their conclusions and their advice from their unique perspectives having lived through the most traumatic and significant events of the conflict, in order to glean that knowledge and how that advice could be effectively and attractively presented to future generations.

What format did the work take and why did you use this approach?

The work took the form of a graphic novel, with six pages per subject and the resulting book was produced in both printed and digital form. Participants were asked for key events in their past. From that we produced a narrative and then a script and from the script sequential illustrations. The medium particularly appeals to young people and I've discovered it's a good way to tackle contentious and difficult subject matter. In this case, the idea that the artwork would be made available, not just to academics, but to schools, colleges and universities was very appealing. It also meant that we were able to gather the experiences of a range of people and condense it into one form that could then be widely and easily accessed.

Who were involved in your work?

The stories told included the late David Ervine's (participant is his widow Jennifer), the Reverend David Latimer, Laurence McKeown, Margaret O'Donnell, Dr Eamon Baker, Alan McBride and Sarah Kerrigan (née Meenan). We also consulted and spoke with immediate and surviving family members.

What impact did the project have on you?

First of all, it was a profoundly humbling experience. Bearing witness to extreme suffering and years of grief and pain makes one grateful for the life one has had. It really brought home the unseen and forgotten cost of war and conflict and how that loss can be politicised and manipulated by some, just how long that hurt can last and how traumatic loss and experience can impact on lives, long term. Another aspect was the perspective time and distance had given to those experiences and how that gave a whole different perspective to the long journeys of the participants. I recognised the individual humanity that emerged from those telling their stories regardless of religious or political labels and how they went from naïve, romantic groups to individuals (losing their youth/ignorance/bigotry) to educated humanists. Interestingly, education seemed to be a common thread running throughout most of the stories. It, above all else, seemed to produce profound change in those telling their stories. Extraordinary circumstances can produce extraordinary people. It's almost as if something planned and perpetrated by indoctrinated teenagers and men in their early twenties at the height of the conflict, fired-up with religious or nationalistic fervour and carried out in the heat of the moment, can still have a profound effect on both the lives of those who committed the acts and those who survived them that lasts an entire life-time. In fact, it's almost as if those who want to do harm or kill people who differ from them actually create the seeds of their own demise as a community way beyond any predicting because of the intensity with which people react to intense oppression and hatred. Prisoners become MPs, academics, peacemakers, doctors, MLAs, MEPs, senators, heads of government and government departments, councillors, and people with global influence. They become educated and instigate social and political change.

Do you feel that involvement with the project has made a difference to the participants?

I believe it has. The Rev. Latimer described the stories as 'having a power'. I have felt for a long time that the 'cultural sector' has a crucial role to play in the peace process here. I believe that these highly influential participants recognised the soft, effective 'power' of the art in the project. Others were taken aback at the artwork and seeing themselves portrayed thus, as were their relatives. There was genuine gratitude at the recording of the stories of those long lost and having their images and memories realised in graphic form, especially portraits. I believe if victims are encouraged to tell their stories, exposing them to the healing properties of art, then a form of inner, spiritual healing can follow. Together, the participants have come into contact with hundreds, if not thousands of victims and survivors of the long conflict here. If they are impressed by the effect these stories have on them then, they must be worthwhile and can work as an effective tool in the search for lasting peace and reconciliation, not just here, but anywhere.

What for you was the best thing about the project?

I think the best aspect has been working with like-minded individuals and professionals. The staff of The Playhouse and in particular, Liam Campbell, the project co-ordinator, could not do enough to support me. Setting up contacts, arranging meetings, sounding out and discussing my ideas and providing encouragement has all greatly contributed to the realisation of a very novel and delicate addition to the whole business of peace and reconciliation here. I have met many of the most significant figures and personalities within the peace and reconciliation community here, human beings who have demonstrated that war not only produces horror, pain and suffering but can also produce the very best people who spend lifetimes producing the opposite.

What was the audience reaction to the work produced?

That may be subject to a longer assessment over time. Publications have long shelf lives. It would be interesting a year down the line after the book has been as widely distributed as we can to gauge a more comprehensive reaction.

ANNE CRILLY

Why did you choose to apply to be involved in the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy Project?

This was a unique opportunity to be involved in a unique project. I had attended other Peacebuilding Academy Projects and was impressed with how sensitive topics were explored in high quality art.

The Project

I developed a new play by Derry writer Micheal Kerrigan. The play focuses on two young men at the start of the Troubles in Derry 1969 and explores the different types of political and personal freedom in 'Free Derry'.

What format did the work take and why did you use this approach?

The stage play was due to be performed at the end of March 2020 but was postponed due to COVID-19. It is scheduled for a performance which will be captured for audio broadcast on 30th September 2020. The September performance will be a stripped back production to reflect the consequences of COVID-19 on Theatre production.

Who was involved in your work?

Research participants were mostly from the LGBTQ community in Derry who reflected on issues relating to sexual identity in a time of conflict. The writer, Micheal Kerrigan, explored these issues further in his play *Beyond the Barricades* and gives a unique insight into issues of masculinity and war and asks the question "Who was free in 'Free Derry'".

What impact did the project have on you?

Firstly, I learned about experiences I was mostly unaware of relating to the hidden LGBTQ experiences at the start of the Troubles in Derry. During rehearsals, I was further convinced of the power of theatre to explore sensitive issues in a safe and non-threatening manner.

Do you feel that involvement with the project has made a difference to the participants?

Their experiences have been valued and many remarked about the liberating effect of being able to freely discuss LGBTQ issues in relation to the Northern Ireland conflict.

What for you was the best thing about the project?

Developing the script with Micheal Kerrigan and seeing it brought to life by the talented actors before COVID-19 struck was a unique privilege. I was delighted to be able to develop this script which explores ideas of masculinity and war in the Northern Ireland context. Seeing the actors learn about neglected experiences and bringing these experiences to life through drama really vindicated the Theatre & Peace Building Academy project.

What was the audience reaction to the work produced?

The impact during rehearsals on cast and crew from the North West and beyond has been enormous. We have all learned so much about a hidden part of the history of the Troubles in Derry and feel privileged to be part of the project.

DECLAN KEENEY

Why did you choose to apply to be involved in the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy Project?

I have a long relationship with The Playhouse that goes back over 10 years as a filmmaker and I've always found them to be incredible people to work with. The work they do in the community is inspiring and I wanted to be part of that once more.

The Project

Most of my research and creative work is in some aspect of virtual reality. Exploring new and immersive ways to tell the stories of this place and its people has always been a consuming interest for a few years now. As someone who grew up on the border, I wanted to explore the theme of 'border'. Any border has two sides. Every story has at least two sides and this is certainly true of the past conflict on this island. During the Brexit discussion the term 'hard border' came into everyday use. The military structures are gone, but the border has defined the lives of so many on this island for many years. The work is entitled 'Frictionless' after comments made by former Prime Minister Theresa May on solutions for the Irish Border post Brexit.

What format did the work take and why did you use this approach?

The work takes the form of cinematic virtual reality. Shot in 8k resolution and in 360 degrees using specialist multilens cameras. The film enables you to transport to the location in ways previously not possible.

The film can be watched on computer with headphones or better still using a virtual reality headset. The audio is also recorded in ambisonic. This means, as you turn your head to view the film, the sound sources stay where they would be in real life. The sound is recorded in 360 degrees on specialist microphones.

What for you was the best thing about the project?

The opportunity to tell unheard stories in new ways. VR is a format that enables me to step into the shoes of those we hear speaking and be present in their space for a short time. The material sense of being present is very moving and was one of the key things that sticks with you after watching the film and hearing their stories.

EMER KENNY

Why did you choose to apply to be involved in the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy Project?

I applied to be involved in the Theatre & Peace Building Academy Project as I wanted to give voice, through music, to victims and survivors from both sides of the religious and political divide in Northern Ireland and the Border areas. I feel music can tell stories and convey emotions that other artistic mediums cannot do, and I was very interested to make a CD so that their stories had a life after the launch of our project.

The Project

I led up a project involving interviewing six victims and survivors from both sides of the political and religious divide in Northern Ireland and the border areas. From these long interviews, many in excess of two hours long, I wrote and recorded songs. I don't in any way feel that I expressed all of the issues raised in these interviews but through editing and writing music I believe I have highlighted as a writer/composer, the most poignant and powerful elements of these interviews. The work addressed the issues of loss of family members and friends, sadness and deep feelings of betrayal and somewhat abandonment and lack of justice from both the Irish and British States. Importantly, I also wished to address the politics of music and shine a light on the fact that tunes associated with political or sectarian views often have very mixed pasts. Some participants chose only to play music and not be interviewed, whilst some did both and others contributed spoken word only.

What format did the work take and why did you use this approach?

We made a CD. We had a live launch with excerpts of music and live spoken word from some participants from tracks and interviews on the CD. I was very keen with this project not to just have a live musical event as I really wanted this project to have the possibility of a longer life to allow the participants' stories to be heard.

Who was involved in the work?

Stephen Travers, Margaret English, Rev. Gary Hastings, Will Glendinning, Mary Cunningham and David Cunningham. John Murphy engineered and produced and we hired various musicians.

What impact did the project have on you?

I genuinely feel that it has been the most challenging and rewarding artistic experience that I have ever had. I have gained a huge insight into the endless sadness that the violence inflicted on these people has had and how it has coloured the rest of their lives. I feel very privileged that they shared their stories with me and my producer, John Murphy and trusted me to try and convey their stories through music.

Do you feel that involvement with the project has made a difference to the participants?

I hope that the participants are happy the process of making the CD and with the CD itself. Hopefully, their stories will be heard by people who otherwise might not be aware of their stories.

What for you was the best thing about the project?

The best thing for me about the project was getting to spend time with these wonderful people who opened up their lives in such an open and trusting way with such sad and powerful stories and trusted me to convey their stories musically.

EILEEN McCLORY

Why did you choose to apply to be involved in the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy Project?

I applied to the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy project as I have been increasingly interested in making socially responsive work that blends intergenerational and community projects with professional practice. I wanted to explore the initial stimulus of Transgenerational Epigenetic Inheritance - the transmission of trauma through the DNA in post-conflict generations and how a dance theatre production can be a way of highlighting this to a wider audience. The opportunity to fully explore and create a work through the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy Project was an opportunity I could not miss.

The Project

TURF was an evocative dance theatre production exploring our troubled past through a fusion of original poetry and music, performed by a professional and community cast. The work was an exploration into the early years of the Troubles inspired by discussion and workshops with a wonderful group of participants who were from Co. Londonderry and Co. Donegal. We worked with poet Maria McManus who created a series of poems that were inspired by the stories told by the group. The main themes addressed in the work were that of conflict and a collective sense of grief and uncertainty that created a lingering thickness in the air. Throughout the dance theatre piece, the work portrayed riots, peace walks, wakes, protests and community issues that were felt throughout the province during the Troubles and are still felt by those deeply affected by them. The overarching theme was "Imagine if it never happened. Imagine if life was normal, ordinary, mundane".

What format did the work take and why did you use this approach?

I created a dance theatre work and choose this approach as I have developed a creative process that investigates the honesty of the performer's imperfections to create raw, physical movement material that explores the human condition. I have always been fascinated by the potential of creating experimental, original and innovative work through collaborative interactions with committed and professional performers.

Central to my work is how bodies convey, carry and hold memory which has been essential in finding effective ways to share stories and experiences, beyond words, but with truth and integrity core to experience. When the participants began to trust each other, they began to tell stories about their lives and what they couldn't express through words, they were able to explore through their bodies.

Who was involved in your work?

Mary Johnston, Shelia Smyth, Sylvia McShane, Bernard Donaghy, Eamonn O'Donnell, Christine Cowley Rhonda

What impact did the project have on you?

The project had a profound effect on me. I did not realise before we started that I would begin to question my own lived history of the Troubles and how it affected myself and my family. Working so intensely, and with an incredible group of people both cast and crew, was a wonderful experience that I learned a so much from. It was not always easy. The work provoked a lot of emotions from the community participants and professional cast that it was difficult to manage at times. As a choreographer, your goal is to create a new brilliant piece of work but this project required a deeper understanding of ensuring correct safeguarding was in place to support empathy for the participants and the audience when working practices included reconciliation amongst individuals and communities from opposing viewpoints. Working with trauma was challenging and we had to trust each other and put in measures for regular check-ins to ensure we were not taking the work home with us in a negative manner. I made sure there was plenty of craic in the room and that even though the topic was heavy we were keeping it light.

Do you feel that involvement with the project has made a difference to the participants?

The participants were brilliant. They were incredibly committed to the project. It was the first time many of them had been on a stage and to be exploring their lived experience through dance was certainly a challenge. I hope this experience was a worthwhile one and something that they feel was a big achievement. I was so proud of them and they were just buzzing after the performance with their family and friends. I hope the longer lasting effect are positive.

What for you was the best thing about the project?

The best part of the project was the fun had with the participants in the workshops and in rehearsals. The group were so generous through the process sharing their stories and allowing me to create a piece of work that was challenging and beautiful at the same time.

What was the audience reaction to the work produced?

The response to the work was overwhelmingly positive. The feedback that has stayed with me was from an ex-RUC officer. He said it was one of the most beautiful and powerful depictions of the Troubles he has seen. At times it was so close to the bone, he could feel hairs on the back of the neck but that each moment was portrayed with such subtlety, nuance and symbolism that it was so incredibly moving and has stayed with him ever since.

CONAN McIVOR

Why did you choose to apply to be involved in the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy Project?

The Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy project offered me the support, funding and profile to realize a story concept that I couldn't get funded through traditional film channels.

The Project

Forgive Me Not is a short film telling the story of a former paramilitary member seeking atonement from a victim's wife. In contemporary Northern Ireland, many of those who lived through the Troubles are reaching old age. At the heart of *Forgive Me Not* lies a series of profound propositions: Can a post-conflict society truly heal without atonement? Can we achieve reconciliation when victims' memories are failing? What is the role of forgiveness in the healing process? *Forgive Me Not* explores these questions through engagement with individuals personally affected by conflict.

What format did the work take and why did you use this approach?

As a filmmaker the short film format was a natural choice for me. It allowed me to dramatise a story, drawing upon elements of individual narratives without becoming autobiographical and offered an artistic buffer within which to interrogate the themes in a safe way without the work becoming judgmental.

Who was involved in your work?

Following a period of pre-development with The Playhouse staff, six cross-community participants affected by the social/political themes of the script were identified as consultants and engaged with throughout the production processes.

Those interviewed for the film included two sisters whose brother was murdered by the British Army in 1976, a former paramilitary quartermaster, a lady whose husband was murdered by the IRA, a nurse who cared for victims from both sides of the community in the darkest days of the conflict and a lady whose family owned the Droppin' Well Inn (bombed by the INLA in 1982). The testimonies of these interviewees helped shape the script of the film, which then went into production with two of the participants appearing in the film.

What impact did the project have on you?

The project made me recognise and connect to my own personal and family links to the conflict. This was a profound realisation for me.

Do you feel that involvement with the project has made a difference to the participants?

I believe the participants feel some sense of shared ownership of the film which I am very proud of.

What for you was the best thing about the project?

The engagement with the six participants was extremely valuable and eye opening. It also gave me the confidence to tell the story from an informed point of view.

What was the audience reaction to the work produced?

The final film has been presented at both The Playhouse and Queen's University as part of a broader conversation about truth, justice and legacy. The audience reaction was very positive with many people finding the piece moving and thought provoking.

LAURENCE McKEOWN

Why did you choose to apply to be involved in the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy Project?

The TPA project interested me and the flexibility offered in terms of what genre of artistic expression to use, meant I was keen to be involved. My project was called, *In the Shadow of Gullion*.

Can you tell us about the project that you led up? What issues did your work address?

In the Shadow of Gullion looked at the experience of seven people with very differing experiences of life in South Armagh during the conflict. The over-arching intention of the project was not to interrogate the rights and wrongs of each shared story – but rather to present the different perspectives of those involved leading up to, during and after the event as well as the legacy for individuals today – in the spirit of promoting understanding by offering personal insight and in the context of peace building. The key theme was ‘survival and retaining dignity in the face of adversity’.

What format did the work take and why did you use this approach?

In the Shadow of Gullion used film, sound, theatre, music, song, and narration to show how South Armagh, an area designated as one of natural beauty, is rich in folklore, culture, and tradition but has also suffered strife and conflict over many centuries. Using a variety of genres allowed the production to recapture a sense of the past whilst being firmly rooted in the present.

Who was involved in your work?

The seven victims and survivors from South Armagh who I collaborated and engaged with for the piece (some of whom appeared on stage) included: a former RAF pilot Mike Johnson, who was shot down by the IRA in South Armagh in the 1970s; Rita Restorick, whose 23 year old son Stephen who was killed by an IRA sniper in Bessbrook in 1997; Paddy Quinn, who took part in the 1981 hunger strike; Jimmy Fox, whose nephew, Seamus Ludlow (47), was killed by the loyalist Red Hand Commando in 1976; Michael O’Hare, whose sister Majella was shot dead by Paratroopers in 1976, aged 12; and Mary Mc Conville, whose sister Ann McGeeney was a victim of IRA harassment.

What impact did the project have on you?

The project had a very positive impact on me. It had integrity. It was great to work with all of those involved, to feel the enthusiasm they had for the project, and to produce the final piece which was extremely well received.

Do you feel that involvement with the project has made a difference to the participants?

I believe, from personal feedback I received, that the participants thoroughly enjoyed taking part in the project but more importantly, felt that their story had been affirmed by the inclusion of it in the project.

What for you was the best thing about the project?

The diversity of the narratives presented and the willingness of all to very openly and honestly engage in the project – and to have a good time in doing so.

What was the audience reaction to the work produced?

Very powerful, very emotional.

LOCAL ARTISTS – EVALUATION NOTES

At the focus group conducted with Local Artists appointed in the first phase of the programme, the following themes emerged:

Motivations for applying:

Mentorship did not really factor into the local artists applying for the project. Most artists appeared to have applied because someone suggested that they should, which would indicate that the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy did not necessarily reach artists who are new to the arts/peacebuilding nexus.

Motivations for applying included:

- *Opportunity to make new work.* The opportunity for a new commission was attractive to all. The call addressed the lack of project funding available for individual artists. For another artist it provided an opportunity to gain funding for an arts project related to the past that was previously not fundable through other arts funding streams.
- *Opportunity to gain experience working with, and within, different art forms and genres* (e.g. poetry, dance, Virtual Reality, music, the relationship of moving image to theatre) and explore how they communicate stories differently.
- *Opportunity to gain experiences and new perspectives in working with stories associated with the Conflict.* Artists approach the subject matter of the conflict, the Troubles differently. With different perspectives and methodologies and with different levels of experience in having worked within this topic area. This project provided an opportunity for artists to explore that further.

Operations:

Local artists reflected on the process of creating work, highlighting the following:

- *Accessing groups / participants.* Local artists were either assigned community participants to work with. In other instances, they were to be given access via the ‘international’ artists. The Playhouse was quite supportive for most artists in terms of accessing groups / participants, but the review of the programme following *Blood Red Lines* certainly did have an impact on others, delaying the start of projects in some instances.
- *Timing.* The application process was reopened in July, which meant that the artists weren’t informed they were starting until September and had to be finished by December. This time frame put a lot of pressure on the professional dancers and choreographer to support the ‘community participants’. It also prevented some time to build rapport. At times there was miscommunication between the Playhouse and participants regarding what was going to take part in the creative process.
- *Production support.* Artists who completed projects in the first phase of the programme felt that they largely had the support from the Playhouse’s administrative team when they needed it, but this differed depending upon the particular art form. Expectations and clarification on what the Playhouse meant by producing was felt by some artists to be needed.

- *Roles and responsibilities.* In relation to delivering the local arts projects these were not always clear. While *everyone* spoke well of the Playhouse staff, there was a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities. In some cases the artists contributed to the work of the ‘International/National’ artists’ projects in a way that was clearly understood by all parties to be a separate contract from their involvement in the project as ‘local artists’, but in other cases there seemed to be an expectation that the local artists’ work should contribute and form an integral part of the International/National artist’s work. Local artists assigned as mentees to Robert Rea were initially unclear around budgets and fees—specifically whether or not the ‘local’ artist’s budget or time was in any way to be allocated to the ‘international’ artist’s project and this had to be clarified by the project organisers. This issue did not arise for those being mentored by Jo Egan.

Engaging with Participants

- *Responsibility, care and respect were of paramount importance to all the local artists.* There was a sense of responsibility towards the participants, and a sense of respect for the fact that people had shared their experiences and stories and a desire to ensure that respect translated into the artwork. ‘Authenticity’ was referred to.
- *Involvement of community participants in the artistic process.* For some artists it felt there was an over-expectation regarding the ways in which community participants might engage in the artistic process. One artist felt that there was not enough time to prepare participants fully for taking part in a final artistic showcase, nor time to allow participants to opt-out of participation in a final showcase. Sensitivities around arts methodologies and methods for engaging participants needs further exploration.
- *Relationship building.* The difficulties experienced by Robert Rea’s mentees resulted in delays in completion of those local artists projects who were advised to wait until participants were assigned while relationships between the Project Partners were redefined.

Results from Making Art:

- *A varying degree of artistic freedom.* Some artists felt that what they were commissioned to make did not come with requests for certain formats and styles. Some felt there was too much prescribed in terms of deliverables and that the deadline for delivery was very limiting.
- *An opportunity to develop one’s artistic practice (for most).* Whether engaging with other artists involved in the Academy, receiving support from the Playhouse for engaging with community participants, working with new art forms or working in new ways with community participants, all artists who completed artistic projects feel that they have developed their practice.
- *Artists felt positively about the work they created.* All who had thus far worked with community participants, found them to be very engaging (Eileen, Laurence, Conan) and heavily influencing of the creative process. The reception of work was also felt to be very positive.
- *There is room to explore the impact of the artistic process on the artist in more detail.* Typically evaluation tends to focus on the impact of the work on participants and audiences rather than the artist.

Understanding and Approaching Mentoring:

While all artists were open to the idea of learning and sharing practice and taking part in reflective processes, the conception of mentoring and its application in the Academy was somewhat problematic for most:

- *Expectations of Mentoring.* There was a lack of clarity around what was meant by mentoring from the perspective of the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy and how they determined 'mentoring' needs. Initially, the majority of the artists seemed to have the impression that the 'local artist' would be servicing the creative vision of the 'international artist' to some extent, rather than making work in their own right. There was not opposition to supporting the 'international' artist, but a lack of clarity may have led to some tensions and confusion around what the remit of the local artist actually was.
- *The language of mentoring was problematic.* Learning was felt to be continual and non-hierarchical. The hierarchical nature of the labelling of 'international' and 'local' artist was felt to be defeatist. It was felt that more could have been done to facilitate learning that was multi-directional, between all artists and including with the administrative team.
- *Artists were interested in the opportunity to reflect, share and learn from other artists working the arts / peace building nexus.* Despite the difficulties with the concept of mentoring, there was, however, an interest in understanding how other artists approach a topic or concept and how they develop their creative process. There was also interest in the way in which people might learn from one another regarding the relationships between art forms, e.g. Virtual Reality / moving image / theatre. There was a real openness to observe one another's practice and exchange ideas and talk in a safe space about the practice of arts/peacebuilding with one another.

The Mentoring Process:

In the first phase of the programme, the artists who were supported by Jo Egan and those who were supported by Robert Rea reported very different mentoring experiences. For those working with Jo, there were solid and helpful relationships. Artists ('local artists') seemed to have met with or spoken to their mentor ('international artist') two or three times.

- *There were varied levels of experience in the nexus of arts / peacebuilding amongst the local artists.* All of whom who could (and in some cases did) learn from one another, which perhaps exceed the expectations of the Academy proposal.
- *The quality of any 'mentoring' or exchange experience* between artists is associated with the openness of the artists involved to that exchange (to give and receive mentoring); the time and resources available for doing so, and the potential links seen between art forms; artistic approaches (and a sense of shared language between art forms); and ways of working with 'community'.
- *Mentoring was felt to come from different places and this relates strongly to the different needs of each local artist.* One artist felt they gained much in terms of mentorship from Liam Campbell, the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy Local Project Coordinator. This related to ways of engaging with people, approaches for navigating sensitivities and thinking about how to give voice to those participating in or informing your creative process. Gaining awareness of the fact that you do, but also how you, interpret those stories.
- *Collaboration occurred between artists,* but this was largely accidental and based on existing networks or pre-existing acquaintance.

Follow up / Legacy—An Exit Strategy

There is always “more time than you have” required to build a relationship with participants and this is understood in terms of developing project timelines. What is felt to be important though is building in time after a showcase of work for wrapping up with participants. Building in reflective time and follow up opportunities into project plans for artists and participants to come together is felt to be useful in terms of the emotions shared. It is also useful to consider an exit strategy in terms of artistic engagement. For some participants a new interest in the arts may emerge from engagement in the project, yet it’s unclear as to how or if they are informed of other opportunities to continue that engagement.

Life of artwork after Academy. It is worth capturing the longer-term life of artistic projects produced through the Peace IV fund. Laurence applied for funding for Cooperation Ireland to show the work three more times. (Newry, Dundalk, Monaghan). The film could lend itself to a longer form piece. Eileen’s dance piece has been filmed by Conan, which has allowed it to be shown (though in a different form) in other forums and different settings (Conan thought it could be shown in a different academic setting, tv, etc...)

PHASE TWO OF THE PROGRAMME

The experience of the so-called ‘Local Artists’ evolved throughout the programme, and interviews with Local Artists in Phase 2 indicated that much was learnt from the first phase of the Academy. In particular, the boundaries between the work of International/National Artists and the Local Artists became much more clearly defined and less hierarchically applied. As the project progressed, there were many examples of cross-fertilisation. For example, Laurence McKeown participated as a subject in Joe Campbell’s graphic novel, *Peacemakers* and Declan Keeney contributed as a filmmaker to Laurence McKeown’s multi-media performance. Ailin Conant noted how she drew on some of Pamela’s workshop techniques in the development stages of *First Response*. A more flexible approach was taken to mentoring, with Kieran Griffiths, the director of *Anything Can Happen* also becoming involved. The role of Liam Campbell as the Local Artists’ Coordinator also became more focussed on mentoring and all the Phase 2 artists emphasised his unfailing encouragement and support, particularly when plans had to be adapted to the demands of Covid restrictions.

Beyond the Barricades

Already postponed by more than six months, the production of *Beyond the Barricades* had to be adapted for online performance and Anne Crilly acknowledges the immense support provided by Kieran Griffiths in ensuring that the performance took place, despite additional delays caused by some of the cast having to self-isolate at a late stage in the process. The community participants in this project were older members of the local LGBT community who even today were unwilling to be publicly identified with the project. Although Covid restrictions limited the extent to which they could directly engage with the production process, they watched the performance online and subsequently spoke to Anne about how sensitively they thought this hidden history of the experience of gay people in Derry in the 1960s and 1970s had been expressed. More familiar with making documentaries, Anne also gained increased confidence in working with actors and she was able to adapt her film-making skills to the emerging genre of online performance. She draws attention to the need to avoid wide shots, as many of the audience view the production on their phones.

Questions of Legacy

Pamela began her own process of creating podcasts with members of WAVE by conducting a poetry workshop with her participants and she regrets not transcribing it because it provided such a rich stimulus for the story-telling that followed. She sees this as a strong argument for an artist using their own discipline to open up discussion. She allowed participants to interview one another, as their own experience allowed for a mutual sense of empathy. A menu of questions was collectively agreed, and each interview was based on a random selection including two relating to the past, two to the present and two to the future. This created a strong sense of spontaneity. The questions for one blind participant were provided in braille. The WAVE participants were passionate about having their voices available for future generations. Throughout the project, Pamela felt fully supported by the Playhouse, especially by Liam Campbell by whom “no question was dismissed”.

Peacemakers

The impact of the condensed dialogue and the intensity of the stylised imagery in *Peacemakers* has proved strikingly affecting and clearly illustrates the potential of the medium for communicating complex ideas in an impactful and engaging ways. Joe Campbell hopes that the book and online PDF version will be widely used in educational contexts. The content has been carefully balanced to represent both sides of the community divide, though further editing of the text might be considered for a second edition, as a reference to “colonists”, for instance, might prove alienating to a PUL readership. Joe normally works from photographs posed by models, but the Covid restrictions and nature of the story-telling led him to base many of the drawings on archival photographs allowing the drawings to vividly evoke the real events in a heightened way. Joe spoke of the special challenge of creating an image of Laurence McKeown on hunger strike, which he approached in as clinical a way as possible, drawing on Holocaust imagery and a photograph of Bobby Sands in his coffin to create a drawing of visceral intensity. As the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy developed into its second phase, the somewhat arbitrary distinction between local and international/national artists became increasingly blurred. What emerged was much more a sense of a mature community of artists with the common purpose of applying their artistry for the purposes of peacebuilding. The diverse range of artistic disciplines added to this sense of extended learning and an increasing focus on the peer learning opportunities provided by the Academy was evident in the discussion between some of the artists in the programme’s closing conference. These developments reflect well on the Playhouse Team’s readiness to apply the learning achieved in the early stages of the programme.

ART IN PLACE OF CONFLICT: An Online Conference

Presented live from The Playhouse Derry-Londonderry

17th September 2020

SESSION 1: Launch of work of two artists commissioned by the Academy.

10.20am-10.50am Premiere of *Frictionless* VR film by Declan Keeney

11.00am-11.30am Premiere of *Peacemakers* a graphic novel by Joe Campbell

SESSION 2: An Artist's Perspective – Art in Action – Creative Dialogue

11.45pm-12.30pm Playwright and director Jo Egan, theatre artist Ailin Conant, writer Pamela Brown and filmmaker Conan McIvor. The conversation will be facilitated by David Grant, Senior Lecturer Queen's University Belfast.

ZOOM BREAKOUT SESSIONS

12.45pm-1.15pm *Questions of Legacy* Podcast streaming with Pamela Brown

12.45pm-1.15pm *Forgive Me Not* film screening with Conan McIvor

12.45pm-1.15pm *Using traumatic memories of conflict to make theatre* with Jo Egan

12.45pm-1.15pm *First Response* workshop with Ailin Conant

SESSION 3: Artistic Processes in Settings of Conflict

2.00pm-2.45pm **John Paul Lederach** (keynote lecture) followed by conversation with Gerard Deane

SESSION 4: Legacy of Conflict

3.00pm-3.45pm Internationally acclaimed photographer Giles Duley will discuss the legacy of conflict, and the power of activism with Mary Cremin from Void; contemporary artist and cultural activist Khaled Barakeh will present recent work with displaced Syrian artists.

SESSION 5: Healing Divides of Difference

4.00pm – 5pm Teya Sepinuck, founder of Theatre of Witness
Session includes 15 min Q&A. Facilitated by Eamonn Deane

SESSION 6: Art as the Antidote to Conflict

5.15pm – 5.45pm Hector Aristizabal – Art as Ritual or the place where Humanity Heals.
Facilitated by Jo Egan

SESSION 7: Conference Reflections

5.50pm – 6.00pm Conference reflections by Anthony Russell

SESSION 8: LIVE STREAMED THEATRE PRODUCTION

8.00pm-10.00pm *ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN 1972: Voices from the Heart of The Troubles*
by Damian Gorman and directed by Kieran Griffiths

Covid restrictions required the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy's closing conference to move online. Despite some initial difficulties with some participants accessing the range of online platforms provided, a wide audience was reached, and recordings of the sessions continue to be available, attracting an ever increasing audience. Feedback comments on the consistent quality of the sessions and the appropriateness of the running times for online consumption.

Online Audience Response

“Excellent 👍” *Conference Delegate YouTube*

“Seriously. I love the phrasing of feeling a deep need to explain and what that means for art as a vehicle or platform for that and/or resist that.” *Conference Delegate YouTube*

“My goodness, so moving..... Wonderful, wonderful.people....my love to you all.”

“Such an insight to your work and world of theatre. You all do a great job with such great care of the participants.x” *Conference Delegate Facebook*

“Thank you sharing, really interesting and so great to be able to listen online!!” *Conference Delegate Facebook*

“Really enjoyed hearing the artists’ experience of creating the work!” *Conference Delegate Facebook*

“Thanks for sharing the use of this new extraordinary way of using technology to enhance the power of storytelling. I look forward to seeing more of what you are able to create in this pioneering field of exploration at The Playhouse.” *Conference Delegate Facebook*

“Geraldine. Listening to your story which I'm aware of as I too, lost a loved one in Dublin in 1972” *Conference Delegate Facebook*

“This such a great idea, and so well done” *Conference Delegate Facebook*

“When the maps of reality we walked are destroyed by war and violence the invisible threads of art and mythos help us reweave the paths to the new world” *Conference Delegate Facebook*

“Love this!” *Conference Delegate Facebook*

“Art has been a healing force for my past” *Conference Delegate Facebook*

“Keep up the excellent work” *Conference Delegate Facebook*

“Very powerful and moving, wonderful to hear Giles’ insights” *Conference Delegate Facebook*

“Beautiful images and stories” *Conference Delegate Facebook*

“Really arresting and haunting work from Khaled Barakeh” *Conference Delegate Facebook*

“This is a great lineup” *Conference Delegate Facebook*

“Astounding” *Conference Delegate Facebook*

“Engrossing” *Conference Delegate Facebook*

“I continue to be amazed by @gilesduley, his work, his personal story, his activism, his ability to amplify people’s voices and stories through the #art of #photography. Thanks to @PlayhouseDerry for this opportunity . #PeaceIV” *Conference Delegate Twitter*

John Paul Lederach

“Thanks John Paul the bridge metaphor leads me to think of the threshold in the process of initiation and the liminal space underneath. That place between the violence of war and the creation of meaning in the artistic path” *Facebook Hector Aristizabal*

“Thank you for the weaving and the beauty of the talk itself. I love the imagery of the periphery. The margins. You embody the embodiment....” *Facebook Teya Sepinuck*

“You don't build a bridge starting in the middle – an interesting and poetic lecture from Prof John Paul Lederach, talking about his understanding of the arts in peace building, its use in rebuilding the soul.” *Conference Delegate Twitter*

Teya Sepinuck

“Yes dearest Teya. With Theater of Witness you have shown us how peace is written in the heart of people and art is the language of the soul.” *Facebook Hector Aristizabal*

KEY FINDINGS

A systematic review of the evaluation data has identified a wide range of themes relating to the role of artists and the arts in peacebuilding, the experience of project participants and audiences, and operational issues arising from the detailed delivery of the programme. But four overarching ideas have emerged that draw these themes together.

- 1. A Rich Collegiate Learning Experience:** What was originally conceived of as a legacy programme for the Theatre of Witness has evolved into a more broadly-based concept of a Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy, through which a community of artists, both professional and community-based have enjoyed a rich learning experience with positive benefits for all concerned, regardless of their level of prior experience. The ability of the programme to adapt as it progressed and to learn from its own practice has been central to that successful outcome, not least when faced with the challenges of the Covid emergency. The programme also served to illustrate the value of bringing together a number of community and voluntary sector organisations to jointly manage an arts-based peacebuilding project – a rare example of PEACE 4 funding being directly accessed by the deliverers of programme, rather than through the mediation a local authority.
- 2. Beginnings, Middles & Ends:** Ursula McHugh, the counsellor for the second phase of the programme, explained her own practice in terms of beginnings, middles and ends. The Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy has highlighted the importance of supporting the artists who lead and facilitate arts-based peace projects at all stages of the process, not only at the research stage where they will often repeatedly revisit traumatic testimony, but also after the conclusion of a project which is likely to leave artists profoundly affected by the experience. More extensive early engagement between the Project Partners would also have enabled them to arrive at a clearer shared vision for the programme that might have pre-empted issues that later arose.
- 3. The Generational Turn:** The involvement of student performers in *First Response* had the unexpected effect of throwing emphasis on the changing audience for arts-based peace building as we move further into the Peace Process and a decreasing proportion of the population have direct lived experience of the conflict. Participants in the *Questions of Legacy* podcasts, for instance, cited a concern for their stories to be available to younger generations as a key motivator. There is a clear connection between the need to reach younger audiences and the widening range of media with which the Academy engaged. The graphic novel, podcasts, music and film all have great potential to reach this extended audience. This generational perspective has a direct bearing on the strategic goals of PEACE 4 Funding to produce demographically measurable attitudinal change.
- 4. The need for flexibility:** The important achievements of the Academy were heavily dependent on substantial financial support from EU Peace Funding through the SEUPB, whose staff worked productively with the Project Partners throughout the duration of the Peace Academy programme. There are strong arguments, however, for SEUPB to review the rigidity with which programmes are managed in order that changing circumstances and learned outcomes can help improve and enhance the effectiveness of programme delivery.

What has been learnt from the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy?

It seems appropriate when evaluating an Academy to express this in terms of learning outcomes and these are some of the findings from each of the main elements of the programme:

Specific learning from *The Crack in Everything*:

- The importance of working with ‘gatekeepers’ when identifying participants
- The specialist counselling and support needs required for this kind of work
- The implications of combining community and professional artists
- The negotiation that is required between the artists’ perspective and the guiding ethos of the programme and the need to adapt to each artist’s vision and distinctive methods
- The role of writing workshops in setting the tone for subsequent production

Specific learning from *Blood Red Lines*

- The need to validate all stories shared in the research period
- The support needs of artists engaging with difficult stories
- The need for clear line management structures for the principal artists
- The additional challenges and expense of managing a project at a distance
- The need for clarity and buy-in in relation to mentoring
- Engagement with neglected stories from south of the border
- The need for clearer budgetary allocations between the major and local projects
- The need for clearer delineation of Project Partner roles and responsibilities

Specific Learning from *First Response*

- Allowing the creative process to become the mediator of internal group tensions
- The avoidance of agreed “trigger” words in group discussion (e.g. “truth”)
- The value of inter-generational engagement to make stories more accessible
- The awareness that the younger generation have their stories too
- The use of expressive imagery such as “the boxes” to convey complex ideas

Specific Learning from *Anything Can Happen*

- The value of open “drop-in” sessions to expand the range of stories told
- The use of writing workshops to help identify stories to be told
- The use of the narrator to allow for the inclusion of untold stories
- The extended reach of an online format and the “sunlit absence” artefacts to represent the audience

Specific Learning from “local projects”

- The problematic nature of the hierarchical “local-international” distinction
- The great potential for peer-learning and the need to facilitate this
- Issues with timescales and resources
- Specific methodological developments such as Pamela Brown’s use of poetry workshops and question banks to stimulate story-telling
- The diversity of forms (dance, music, film, poetry, podcasting, the graphic novel, online performance)
- Ethical challenges of needing commitment from non-professional participants (*Turf*)
- Added value brought to existing project (*Forgive Me Not*)
- The value of what may be perceived as single-identity community context (*In the Shadow of Gullion*)

PARTNERSHIPS

The opportunity provided by the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy programme to engage with one another over a sustained period was greatly valued by all the Project Partners. In a final review meeting, it was suggested that earlier opportunities for team-building would have been beneficial in allowing the emergence sooner of a detailed shared vision for the programme, but this developed rapidly once the programme was underway. Elaine Forde, the Programme Coordinator reflects that:

The Holywell Trust and the Thomas D’Arcy McGee Foundation helped us to deal with the many challenging issues that arose during and after *Blood Red Lines*. The Thomas D’Arcy McGee Foundation introduced Robert Rae to many people deeply affected by the Troubles and took him on local tours of the Newry/Border area. In particular, they introduced Robert to suitable members of the Protestant community, as they saw the need for the local Protestant story to be told. TDMF thought it would be damaging if the Protestant was not included. Collectively the partners the Playhouse Chair, Paul Gosling, enabled us to create a project structure identifying clear roles and responsibilities.

As evaluators, the Queen’s University team sought to retain a critical distance from the day-to-day operation of the programme, but feedback from the partners and artists suggests that the process of periodic reflection we facilitated through interviews and focus groups contributed to collective learning.

FORMAL INNOVATION

A key area of innovation has been in the exploration of the potential for different artistic approaches to facilitating community dialogue. This has had added significance during the Covid crisis, with Pamela Brown’s use of podcasting and Joe Campbell’s graphic novel proving particularly resilient in the face of current restrictions because they can be shared online. Film has also featured strongly, not just in the self-contained work of Declan Keeney and Conan McIvor, but also in the way that they have both collaborated with other artists with Conan creating a vivid record of Eileen McClory’s community dance work *Turf* and Declan contributing some expressive film content to Laurence McKeown’s multi-media performance. Anne Crilly has emphasised the extent to which online performance has also emerged during the Covid crisis as a new and distinct form.

The Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy has also tested the boundaries of the Theatre of Witness model in a number of important ways:

- Through the integration of witness-performers and professional actors in *The Crack in Everything*
- Through the interwoven chronological story-telling and use of Tommy Sands’ songs in *Blood Red Lines*
- Through the physical stage imagery and the symbolic use of the boxes in *First Responders*
- Through Damian Gorman’s linking narrative in *Anything Can Happen* which allowed those who chose not tell their stories in person to be included

PARTICIPANTS

Each of the four major productions have broken new ground in the way the choice of participants has influenced the themes that have been explored:

- An intergenerational approach has been evident in the way in which some of the performers in *The Crack in Everything* have been the younger relatives of those involved in the stories being told
- *Blood Red Lines* introduced an important cross-border dimension with some of the stories relating to stories from the Monaghan and Dublin.
- The involvement of student performers in *First Response*, whose perspective has profoundly influenced the development of the script.
- *Anything Can Happen* incorporated stories arising from “drop-in” sessions and writing workshops facilitated by Damian Gorman during the project scoping period. This allowed the story-telling to be more inclusive reflecting what one participant described as a more everyday experience of the conflict which many audience members could relate to.

THEMES

Common themes emerging from interviews with participants included:

- The importance of being able to express their stories and have them recognised
- The ripple effect of untold stories being brought to the stage, which has worked to the benefit of wider circles of kith and kin.
- Participants also consistently describe the process of being involved in the performances as therapeutic and cathartic, with many examples of their involvement in performances opening up conversations that have been suppressed, sometimes for decades.

THE ARTISTS

The programme has served to challenge the distinction set out in the original funding application between “International” and “Local” artists. While this was based on a legitimate concern to bring the highest level of external expertise within the reach of local practitioners, as it turned out, two of the four major projects were led by artists (Jo Egan and Damian Gorman) deeply connected with the local experience and feedback from across the whole range of participating artists has highlighted the importance of peer dialogue and shared expertise, rather than top-down mentorship. This has been complemented by the outside eye and fresh perspective of the other visiting artists, Ailin Conant and Robert Rae.

AUDIENCES

Themes that have recurred consistently in the response provided by audience members have been:

- The importance they attach to the recovery of unknown or forgotten stories (coming both from those who lived through the Troubles and those born since), including an increased awareness of injustices and cover-ups;
- The desire for the work to be seen more widely and by others including politicians, perpetrators, and young people (lest we forget);
- The raw emotion and power of personal stories from “everyday” people, and a sense of empathy, with connections to audience members’ own stories often being evoked;
- The positive role of the arts in peacebuilding.

The category of words most frequently used were those relating to truth, honesty, authenticity and realism. Next came pain and hurt, which if taken alongside sorrow and loss becomes the largest category. Some remark on an empathy for this and identification with it. Others speak of how the performance allows them to witness the stories with more objectivity because of the ‘affective distance’ provided by the arts. Positive categories such as resilience, strength, courage, love, empathy, family and friendship also occur frequently. Comments like “Personal stories are stronger than statistics” and “ordinary folk making stories come to life” resonate here.

The “wordclouds” shown opposite are based on the frequency with which individual words recurred in audience feedback in relation to the first three major productions. The final composite image is based in words that occur in the feedback more than once. The fact that the word most commonly used in feedback about all the projects is STORY underlines the central role of narrative in these kinds of testimonial theatre events. Unsurprisingly, PEOPLE is also consistently prominent since stories depend on transmission from teller to hearer. But the other most common words provide a helpful visual summary of the nuanced differences between the first three productions.

The word NEED stands out in the response to *The Crack in Everything*, underlining how strongly families were motivated to have the deaths of their lost loved ones recognised. The word FELT looms large in response to *Blood Red Lines*, drawing attention to that production’s exceptional affective power, whereas the word HOPE features prominently in the *First Response* image, capturing the inherent optimism of that performance, with its intergenerational energy. One audience comment about *Blood Red Lines* – “There is no hierarchy of victims” – stands in striking contrast another about *The Crack in Everything* – “There IS a hierarchy of victims” – highlighting the heightened impact of the children’s stories.

Taken together, these responses, even those less positive in tone, capture the mood of empathy and engagement that typically characterises the relationship audiences enjoy with arts-based peace interventions. Our understanding of the overall effectiveness of this work in terms of peacebuilding and attitudinal change needs to be understood, however, in relation to the “ripple effect” described by some many project participants, whereby the arts-based events provide stimulus for further difficult and long-neglected or avoided conversations.

CHALLENGES

In the first phase of the programme:

- There were issues raised by Project Partners in relation to clarity of role, selection of themes and participants, and the delicate ecology of victim-survivor support groups (gate-keepers), but these were addressed in the second phase by involving them more directly in the selection of participants and themes.
- It was clear that the capacity of the Playhouse had been severely stretched by the scale, number and tight timelines required by the project, but the second phase of the programme was better paced and avoided managing projects at a distance.
- There was sometimes a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities, but this was greatly clarified in consultation with the Project Partners.
- There have been some issues raised in relation to structure and duration of performances and some technical decisions
- There was thought to be great potential for greater interaction between artists, partners and other stakeholders in order to maximise the learning benefits of the Academy. This was more evident in the second phase of the programme.

A review at the end of the first phase of the programme allowed these issues to be addressed.

Issues raised by the work of the Academy that merit further discussion included:

- The support needs of professional artists engaged in this work (to complement the comprehensive provision already available for participants and audiences)
- The perceived vulnerability of some participants
- The challenge of ensuring a balanced involvement across the community, especially PUL involvement (for which security forces are sometimes presented as a proxy)
- How to respond sensitively to potential participants whose stories are not told
- The restricted timescales of projects
- The need for adequate “exit strategies” for participants and artists
- The sometimes problematic negotiation of artistic and editorial issues, especially where there is a tension between the artist’s working methods and what is expected of them

Some challenges related more directly to the operation of programme:

- The challenges for an independent arts organisation coping with rigid operational demands
- The insensitivity of having to get participants to complete extensive monitoring paperwork after engaging with emotional testimony
- The difficulty for community and voluntary sector organisations managing cashflow when advance payments are limited and other payment sometimes delayed
- The need to justify minor variations in the budget plan which was time consuming and pulled project workers away from their roles of engaging with vulnerable participants alongside ensuring projects meet their needs and impact on peace and reconciliation objectives
- The need for the Playhouse to subsidise the project through the input of management time
- Throughout the programme, SEUPB staff were helpful and thorough, but a less rigid approach would benefit project delivery

RECOMMENDATIONS

The positive outcomes identified above merit serious consideration of further investment of time and resources in a continuing Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy. But we recommend that further thought be given to the following considerations:

Conceptualise and Articulate what the Academy is. Clarity on the potential and purpose of the 'Academy' model is needed.

- *Define a mentor, but do so through involving all artists.* Local artists reflected that mentors were altruistic and had a genuine interest in sharing. So, this is about understanding what the 'international' artists hope to (and can) give to the mentoring process. Equally, it is important to get a sense of where the local artists are at and what they hope to gain from a mentoring process.
- *As a space for reflection.* What was envisaged by the notion of the 'Academy' was not clear. It seems like a place where you could ask questions as an artist, in a safe place. Academy implies tuition, whereas the format emerging provides peer and reflective learning experiences. International and local artists came from different positions of experience and confidence in the arts / peacebuilding arena. The concept of an Academy could provide a space for reflection, rather than a means for the production of work (outputs).
- *Bring the voice of the artist together with the voice of participants.* The experience and voice of the artist is often neglected in evaluation and reflection processes and the Academy provides a space for this voice. In doing so, it could provide a means to bring artists and participants together to reflect on the work (and in new evaluative ways) that would address some of the issues of legacy raised above.
- *Clearly articulate a pedagogical approach.* E.g. based on Theatre of Witness model or Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.
- *Facilitate the Academy as a 'space' of learning:*
 - Bring the project partners in as participants in the Academy. There is much to be learned from the project partners regarding accessing and working with community participants. Equally, Queen's University could be brought in to facilitate some of the sharing and reflection processes. Holywell Trust could explore ethical frameworks for practice along with artists and the Playhouse's administrative and producing team.
 - See the Playhouse as a participant in the Academy. Sharing its expertise knowledge in this work (and with arts managers as well), but also as one who can learn from the artists and participants.
 - Facilitate a space for artists to meet, but do not prescribe the collaborations and connections that may result. For many artists, there is a sense of isolation in this practice that the environment of the Academy could address more directly. Mentoring and learning cannot be forced, but the Academy can create spaces for that activity and potential collaborations through hosting shared sessions as an integral part of the mentoring. Peer mentoring among the local artists is just as valuable than the perspective from outside, along with project partners and the Playhouse's administrative and producing team.

Issues that can be further explored: (inherent in Arts & Peacebuilding)

- What peacebuilding means from the perspective of different artists, and what the relationship of the arts brings to that process.
- Understanding, exploring and selecting different arts-based / creative methodologies for peacebuilding
- Understanding how the development of art in the peacebuilding space impacts on the artist emotionally, professionally, creatively
- The relationship of one's own politics to the creative process
- Methods for approaching people's stories
- Methods for translating / interpreting people's stories and communicating those methods to the people whose stories an artist is 'minding'.

These findings and recommendations were beginning to be applied in the second phase of the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy programme, albeit inhibited by the changes necessitated by Covid. The closing conference, in particular, provided valuable opportunities for shared learning. The inclusion of more durable media such as the podcasts and the graphic novel have also helped address the legacy issue raised above.

A further development of the Academy would provide a mechanism through mentorship for the sharing and dissemination of good practice arising from the current programme. Insights such as Ailin Conant's conviction that the artistic process is the best mediator and Pamela Brown's use of poetry as a stimulus for story-telling and her use of randomly selected questions from a negotiated list addressing past, present and future realities are difficult to reduce to the form of manual or handbook. But the opportunity for artists to experience one another's practice can facilitate the sharing of lived experience and embodies knowledge.

Specific Additional Recommendations

- For projects of similar duration, we recommend a mid-project review be built into the structure of the programme in order to facilitate a more flexible approach to adjusting the terms of the funding and to take account of learning arising from the initial stages of the work.
- Discussion of a more industry-appropriate method for the appointment of subsidiary artists (designers etc.) e.g. based on Equity baselines rather than tenders
- A consideration of the balance to be struck between the collection of monitoring data and the sensitivity of the working context
- That the project evaluation process be seen a means of supporting artists on similar programmes in the future (as Ailin suggested was the case in the Artists' Discussion in the Closing Conference)
- That the funding application require a less rigid plan and timetable to be put in place – and this is transferred to the letter of offer and claims/reporting procedures. The nature of delivering a project is that things change, people have ideas of how to do things differently and better, and community/participant needs may change or be different from what was originally envisaged. The ability to change project delivery mechanisms is important if you want to have the greatest impact.

EVALUATION

There is clear evidence that the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy has achieved a high level of success when evaluated against the **project objectives** as set out below. Appropriately for an 'Academy', some of this success has been manifested in the way in which the Project Partners have learned from the experience of delivering the programme.

- **Increased opportunities to use arts activity as a mechanism for exploring the conflict and its effects on individuals and communities, exploring difference, building peace and promoting reconciliation**

This was achieved through the successful delivery of the four main theatre productions and the eight subsidiary arts projects. Each arts activity engaged intensively with its core participants to explore the effects of conflict on more than 100 individuals whose stories were being shared, along with their wider communities both as family members and attendees. The time spent in these activities was well in excess of the projected 2,200 hours.

In several projects, arts methods were used not only to share stories but also to assist in the development of the performances. This included creative writing workshops by Jo Egan and Damian Gorman and the use of poetry as a stimulus for discussion by Pamela Brown. Furthermore, many of the audience (including family members of the core participants) referred to the way in which hearing these stories prompted them to share untold stories of their own.

In most cases, given the diverse backgrounds of those involved, an exploration of difference was embedded in the process. In other cases, the difference explored was between the experience of the performers and that of the wider audience. *In the Shadow of Gullion*, for instance, communicated the experience of a rural 'single identity' community in South Armagh to a more mixed urban audience in Duncairn Arts Centre, while *Beyond the Barricades* represented the experience of the LGBTQ community in the 1970s to an online audience, many of whom would be unfamiliar with the lived reality of a generation older than themselves.

Peacebuilding and reconciliation were evident both within each project process and in the response of audience members. Joe Campbell, for instance, spoke of how portraying the stories of peacemakers from a range of backgrounds allowed him to reflect on his own experience and perspective, while Ailin Conant explained the need her process revealed to accommodate different truths within the single narrative of *First Response*, in acknowledgement of the different perspectives and life experiences of individual participants. The response of audiences consistently referred to powerful feelings of empathy with the range of stories told.

One of the most revelatory themes to emerge from the Academy was the increasing importance of intergenerational dialogue, as a decreasing proportion of the population of Northern Ireland and the border counties have direct experience of conflict. This was most explicit in the involvement of university students in *First Response* but has been shown in this report to have been a feature of a high proportion of the Academy's activities.

- **Establishment of strong links between NWPRC (The Playhouse), international artists/ networks, and individuals/organisations in Northern Ireland/Border Counties working in the fields of arts, community relations, health, education, community development and other relevant areas**

A sense of connection has been evident in much of the material gathered for this evaluation. Project participants consistently use the language of family to describe the close bonds that have developed between them as they have worked on their performances and many report a strengthening of family cohesiveness as the projects have allowed suppressed stories to be shared.

The Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy has also initiated and enhanced connections between the Playhouse and its Project Partners – the Holywell Trust, The Thomas D’Arcy McGee Foundation and Queen’s University, Belfast. These relationships have not been unproblematic, but one of the learning outcomes of the Academy has been the way in which issues arising in the first phase of the programme around governance, communications and lines of responsibility have been negotiated and successfully addressed. Individual projects have also allowed new connections to be made, especially with victim and survivor support agencies, including many in the Republic of Ireland.

Most profound have been the strong connections made with the artists and individuals from within and outside Northern Ireland who have been brought together through the Academy in the creation of a mutually supportive creative community. This has called into question the hierarchical assumptions of the distinction between International/National and Local Artists that formed the original architecture of the proposal.

- **Greater willingness and capacity amongst key community and public sector bodies (including Local Authorities, police, schools, health bodies, arts & community groups and Government Departments) to use and acknowledge arts and culture as tools to promote cross-community, cross border, peace building activity**

It seems likely that the high level of visibility achieved by the Academy’s many projects (not least through a sustained and comprehensive social media presence, especially in the programme’s later stages when it was subject to Covid restrictions) will have raised the profile of arts-based peacebuilding among key community and public sector bodies. This would require more specifically targeted research, however, which did not come within the remit of the current evaluation.

- **Increased opportunities for arts and theatre led activities to facilitate regular, sustained and purposeful interaction amongst people from Catholic, Protestant and minority backgrounds**

Across the full range of the Academy programme, a broad cross-section of the Northern Ireland and border counties population was directly engaged and within the majority of individual projects a concerted effort was made to include representatives of both the main communities.

There was an awareness from the outset, however that members of the PUL (Protestant-Unionist-Loyalist) have been less inclined to engage in arts-base peace activities. Additional efforts were therefore made to engage with the PUL community, particularly through the work of project partners, the Holywell Trust and the Thomas D'Arcy McGee Foundation.

Monitoring data collected by the Playhouse indicate that in total there were 68 Catholic and 35 PUL participants directly involved in the 12 Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy projects, but it was evident that *Blood Red Lines* did not have a significant PUL involvement, and the project redoubled its efforts in subsequent projects to redress this deficit. There were, however, many aspects of the programme that served to problematise an over-emphasis on the traditional binary division in Northern Ireland society.

These included the involvement of participants from mixed marriages, those from Nationalist backgrounds who had lived for much of their lives in England, those from Protestant backgrounds living in Donegal and other participants from Dublin, Cavan and Monaghan. Also included were Lee Lavis the former soldier, Rita Restorick, whose 23 year old son Stephen was killed by an IRA sniper in Bessbrook in 1997 and Tom Kelly, the Bogside Artist who spoke so powerfully in *Anything Can Happen* of his conversion to evangelical Christianity. Apart from the LGBT-themed *Across the Barricades*, there is limited evidence of engagement with minority communities, but the Academy has been a valuable platform for celebrating these other kinds of cultural diversities.

- **Ability to reach those most affected by the conflict and improve knowledge amongst Catholic Protestant and minority people of concepts surrounding and leading to conflict, both in N Ireland/Border Counties and globally, and increase mutual respect, empathy, understanding and tolerance**

The Academy engaged extensively with organisations representing victims and survivors, building on well-established links already developed by the Playhouse and its Project Partners, to identify participants for the programme. Some of the lead artists when interviewed acknowledged the value of these networks, but they also welcomed direct access to potential subjects. They were aware of the risk of being restricted to a pre-defined pool of subjects, or of recycling stories that were already widely known and shared.

Damian Gorman, who was also able to draw on his own pre-existing network of contacts through his work with An Crann, was conscious in the 'scoping period' for his project of prioritising PUL contacts to counterbalance his greater familiarity with the CNR community. But he also used his creative writing workshops to help identify potential participants and held two sessions in the Playhouse that were open to all comers in a successful attempt to draw in those who were unconnected with existing networks.

For live events within the programme, the ability to increase mutual respect was closely related to the range of the core participants, in that audiences were attracted by a direct or indirect interest in those who were telling their stories. The wider the range of participants, the greater the capacity for wider community exchange. The enforced reliance on online dissemination for the final stage of the programme increased the potential scope of the audience, and archival recordings have meant that this audience continues to increase.

The capacity of an arts-based approach to peacebuilding to engender empathy in its audiences is abundantly clear from the response to all four of the major projects in interviews and questionnaires.

The range of formal experimentation that characterised the local artists projects also served to extend the reach of the work, both in terms of the way in which ideas were communicated and how the work was accessed. The visceral impact of dance, the intensified expressiveness of the images in a graphic novel or on film and the extended availability of streamable music tracks, podcasts and recordings of online performances have all enhanced the ability of the Academy to reach out.

- **Ability to build capacity in people from Catholic, Protestant and minority backgrounds, strengthen confidence and self-esteem, and ensure participants are better equipped to be leaders in their own areas and beyond.**

The themes selected for the four major projects tended to throw the emphasis on the traditional Protestant and Catholic division in Northern Ireland society and only *Beyond the Barricades* explicitly addressed the stories of a minority (LGBTQ) community. But across the programme, participants reported the huge personal benefits they felt in being able to express their own stories and those of lost loved ones. Beyond the opportunity for expression, the sense of recognition was also important, especially in cases where justice was still felt to be denied. These included the WAVE members whose stories were included in the podcasting project and the families in a number of the projects still seeking acknowledgement of collusion.

- **Greater capacity of local practitioners to develop their own arts and peacebuilding projects with local communities, after the lifespan of the initial Peace IV funded period ensuring that the benefits and skills of the project are retained within N. Ireland/Border Counties.**

Although the original project proposal distinguished between 'International/National' artists and 'local' artists whom they would mentor, one of the main learning outcomes of the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy was that the real distinction between those who were selected for the programme was between more established and emerging practitioners. Jo Egan and Damian Gorman brought with them to their work a deep and sustained knowledge of the Northern Ireland situation, while Robert Rae and Ailin Conant brought more of an outsider's eye.

Of the so-called 'local artists' Laurence McKeown, Pamela Brown, Declan Keeney, Joe Campbell, Emer Kenny and Anne Crilly all had decades of experience of socially-engaged arts practice between them – while Conan McIvor and Eileen McCrory (and indeed Aileen Conant) represented a younger generation of younger artists with fresh perspectives and innovative working methods.

Conclusion

The achievements of the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy stand on the shoulders of a series of earlier Theatre of Witness programmes initiated by Pauline Ross, the Playhouse's Founding Director and funded by successive tranches of EU Peace funding. It is a testament to the tenacity of the Playhouse and the resourcefulness of the Holywell Trust and Thomas D'Arcy McGee Foundation, their Project Partners, that unlike many other independent arts and voluntary organisations, they have continued to rise to the growing administrative demands of a funding stream that is increasingly channelled through Local Authorities. Their large bureaucracies and greater financial reserves make them less vulnerable to cashflow delays and better able to cope with complex reporting procedures. It would be a great loss to the peacebuilding sector if the arts were to feature less in future European Peace programmes, but the rigidity of the systems governing these activities can often stifle the very creativity on which the benefits of arts-based peacebuilding depends. We believe that it is vital that independent arts organisations continue to have direct access to European Peace funding and that suitable mechanisms are put in place to encourage an increasing number of them to engage.

The evidence provided in this report demonstrates the efficacy of the arts to engage with a wide range of people at the deepest level, helping them to challenge their assumptions and presuppositions and to begin to see things in new ways and from opposing perspectives. In particular, it invites us to re-examine some of the assumptions that typically frame peacebuilding activities. The identities explored through the 12 Academy projects are defined as much by geography and gender as by the more familiar categories of Protestant and Catholic and have prompted us to analyse the reach of the Theatre & Peacebuilding in terms of diversities, rather than diversity.

Perhaps the single greatest learning outcome of the Theatre & Peacebuilding Academy has been the discovery of the growing need to address arts-based peacebuilding to a younger generation of audiences who have less direct experience of the conflict. This was evident in the way in which Jo Egan was able to identify artists whose own practice has been informed by traumatic events in their family's past and performers in both *The Crack in Everything*, and *Anything Can Happen* who stepped forward to speak for earlier generations. It was evident too in the way in which John Reavey was inspired by hearing his father tell the story of his family's tragic past in *Blood Red Lines*. But it was most vividly evoked in the dialogue that emerged unexpectedly between the performers in *First Response* and the University of Ulster students with whom they shared the stage. It cannot be a coincidence that Ailin Conant herself is from a younger generation of artists, to whom responsibility for leading the next stage of development of this important work is now being passed.

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Evaluation Team

Appendix: Theatre & Peace Building Academy, Participants Data

Output	Date	Participant Numbers	Engagement Numbers
National/International 6-month residency 1 Jo Egan <i>The Crack in Everything</i> Multi-media theatre production	May-Nov 18	Total: 23 (Inc.; cast and interviewees) Male: 10 Female: 13 Catholic: 18 Protestant: 5	Derry The Playhouse x 600 Brian Friel Belfast x 360
National/International 6-month residency 2 Robert Rae <i>Blood Red Lines</i> Multi-media theatre production	Sept-March 19	Total: 12 participants (inc. 1 additional interviewee) Male: 8 Female: 4 Catholic: 10 Protestant: 1 Other: 1	Newry Town Hall x 700 Brian Friel Belfast x 240 An Tain Dundalk x 350
National/International 6-month residency 3 Ailin Conant <i>First Response</i> Multi-media theatre production	Sept–March 20	Participants x 8 Student participants x 8 Male 5 Female 11 Catholic 8 Protestant 8 Additional: 20 Workshop participants	Derry The Playhouse x 700 Riverside Theatre x 350
National/International 6-month residency 4 Damian Gorman <i>Anything Can Happen</i> Multi-media theatre production	Nov–May 20 Production: 22 nd – 15 th April & 1 st May 20	Participants x 6 Male 3 Female 3 Catholic 3 Protestant 3 Additional: Workshop participants x 30	16 th -19 th September Online approx. 25K
Local Artist 1 Conan McIvor <i>Forgive Me Not/</i> Film	Sept-Dec 18	Total 6 Male 0, Female 6, Catholic 5, Protestant 1	150 at launch in Playhouse Another 300 at Belfast film festival & QFT screenings
Local Artist 2 Eileen McClory <i>Turf /</i> Live Theatre	Sept-Dec 18	Total 8 Male 2, Female 6, Catholic 6, Protestant 1, Other 1	Approx. 140 at launch, then 150 @ QFT screening
Local Artist 3 Laurence McKeown <i>In the Shadow of Gullion /</i> Live Multi-media theatre show	Sept- April 19	Total 7 Male 5, Female 2 Catholic 4, Protestant 3	2 shows: Approx. 180 in Mullagbawn, Armagh 130 in Duncairn, Belfast

Local Artist 4 Eimear Kenny <i>Ghosts /</i> Studio music album	Dec 18-Nov 19	6	Approx. 75 people attended launch in Dundalk. The album also received radio play on BBC Radio Ulster Album available free on hosting site and 100s have engaged
Local Artist 5 Pamela Brown <i>Questions of Legacy</i> Podcast & book	Sept 19-Dec 19	Total: 6 Male 4 Female 2 Catholic 3 Protestant 3	Launch @ Holywell attended by approx. 100, The exhibition remained in place at Holywell for a further 4 days with an estimated audience / engagement of a further 400 people
Local Artist 6 Declan Keeney <i>Frictionless /</i> VR film	Oct 18- April 20 Launch postponed to 17/9/20	Total: 5 Male 3, Female 2 Catholic 3 Protestant 2	Declan Keeney – <i>Frictionless</i> a VR film launched online on 17 th September - audience 8.4K
Local Artist 7 Anne Crilly <i>Beyond the Barricades</i> Live Theatre	Oct – March 20 Production rescheduled for 30/9/20	Total: 5 Male 5 Catholic 3 Protestant 2	Anne Crilly – <i>Beyond the Barricades</i> live streamed on 30 th September. To watch <i>Beyond the Barricades</i> Audience: 3.5K
Local Artist 8 Joe Campbell <i>The Peacemakers</i> Graphic Novel	Nov- April 20 Launch postponed to be 17 th September 20	Total: 7 Male 4 , Female 3 Catholic 4 Protestant 3	Joe Campbell – <i>Peacemakers</i> a graphic novel launched online on 17 th September. To attend our conference entitled <i>Art in Place of Conflict conference – audience 8.4K</i>
CONFERENCE <i>Art in Place of Conflict</i>	Rescheduled 17/9/20		<i>Art in Place of Conflict</i> , an online conference on 17 th September. Audience: 23K