



# ON TOUR:

**NEW PLACES FOR ARTS TOURING**

## **STAY IN TOUCH**

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# BACKGROUND

Creative Scene is the Arts Council England Creative People and Places programme for North Kirklees, West Yorkshire.

We're working with local people to create a place where people not only participate in the arts, they make them happen; working together with professional artists, arts organisations, and producers. It is all about making art a part of everyday life.

North Kirklees is a cluster of small towns with no arts centre and therefore limited access to professional arts activity. Just beyond these towns lie Bradford, Wakefield, Leeds and Huddersfield all with professional arts centres, however audience data shows that very few people are travelling to these neighbouring towns to take part in the arts. Our On Tour programme seeks to explore how we can develop new audiences by working with local people to bring professional touring work to buildings in their towns.

# OBJECTIVES

- To develop a more sustainable touring model enabling local people to access high quality activities on their doorstep.
- To establish two Urban Touring Circuits that capitalises on existing non-traditional venues and brings them together around two distinct audience groups.
- To bring high quality professional touring work into North Kirklees to inspire local audiences.
- To develop local people as promoters with responsibility for selecting and promoting work that is relevant to their communities.

# THE TARGET AUDIENCE

We aim to work with a diverse bunch of people who reflect the demographics of the area and thus the audiences we are trying to reach. The demographics of the area are very mixed with poorer socio-economic areas and audiences with little or no engagement with the arts alongside pockets of more affluent areas with more frequent engagement with arts and culture.

For this particular project we were looking at targeting potential venues and groups that would enable us to take our arts and cultural activity into familiar spaces and places in order to reach people – whilst also looking at supporting existing groups with audience development.

# DELIVERY OF THE ACTIVITY

## Mapping

In order to map potential venues across the area we identified some basic criteria that would need to be met in order for us to work effectively with them over a two-year period to develop audiences for touring work. These included:

- Being accessible by public transport
- Having a warm welcoming feel with accessible facilities
- Likely to be open for the foreseeable future
- An enthusiastic management team who could see the potential of the programme

## Testing

Whilst this mapping was taking place we dipped our toes in the water of touring by working with libraries to programme family show *The Adventures of Walter Lemon Face* into five of the towns. The appetite for family work in the areas was proven to be very promising with a sold out run across all five venues, meaning that programming work geographically quite close was not splitting audiences.

At the same time Dewsbury Arts Group, a local amateur arts group, were programming Peter Maqueen's one-man show *Old Herbaceous*. The group has a history of programming one off professional performances into their own 100 seat theatre which they sell to their members. We decided to partner with them to programme a second night of the show to see if there was potential to develop a broader audience who would come to see productions there.

One of our Creative Producer's worked with the group to look at their existing marketing and ticketing structures and identify opportunities for audience development. This included:

- Placing 20% tickets for sale on line for the first time;
- Identifying subject matter that may have been of interest to other hobby groups and developing offers to encourage group bookings; and
- Developing data capture systems to build audience databases and feed future development.

These efforts led to another sold out performance, increasing the group's income from these productions and increasing their confidence in their ability to programme shows for more than one night. The group also benefitted from new members joining the group as a result of this production and have since started to ticket all of their productions through Ticket Source, reducing the time previously required of volunteers to administer ticketing.

# OUTCOMES

From these two tests we have been able to identify an appetite for touring children's work and have begun developing a children's touring network. We have also been able to identify the need for a programme of bespoke support for venues, managers and volunteers of which will become promoters of the work over the coming years.

## **Next Phase**

From the mapping we have now identified eight venues including sports clubs, community centres, charitable organisations and pubs that we will be working with over the coming year to trial a new urban model of touring that will:

- Introduce audiences to professional arts experiences and share information of nearby arts centres
- Enable venues to benefit from discounts on touring product by collectively programming work across a week. This may include working together with some of the surrounding venues to extend the tours of shows they have programmed
- Have local people as venue promoters, identifying work that will appeal to their audiences
- Find new income generation opportunities around each show appropriate to the venue (e.g. raffles, bar income, etc).

Four venues that have expressed interest in children's work will undertake their first tour in May 2015 when they welcome Ripstop theatre's production of *A Real Mermaid's Story*. The other four venues will be exploring programming for adult audiences, trialling spoken word and pub theatre in the coming months.

Currently the venues are working together with a Creative Scene producer and tour coordinator to identify their training needs and explore their own networks through which they can begin to build audiences. Through this learning process we hope to build and capture methods that are replicable for other venues both in the local towns not represented currently on the circuit but in other urban areas.

# KEY POINTS FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

- Start by talking to local businesses small and large – each will have their own networks and connections to the community within which they are based.
- Be clear about the benefits of working with an arts organisation – how will it help the business achieve its aims surrounding workforce happiness or widening awareness amongst the local community.
- Identify early on what the core objectives your organisation and the business want to achieve, how you will aim to achieve them and roles and responsibilities in making it a success.
- Be clear on levels of investment and from whom – whether this be time, cash or skills input.
- Local businesses – and business associations – have great networks and want more footfall in their town and so have a vested interest in seeing projects succeed.
- Be aware your project, especially in larger businesses might only be one of many so establish a clear point of connection internally at the business from the start who can help drive the project forward.

**For more information contact:**

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