



Dialogues

Evaluation Highlights 2013

Theatre Royal Plymouth

In June 2012, the Theatre Royal Plymouth commissioned an independent evaluation of the Theatre's work with refugees and asylum seekers. This booklet highlights some of the key achievements and successes of the programme.

Theatre Royal Plymouth

The Theatre Royal Plymouth is the largest and best-attended regional producing theatre in the UK and the leading presenter of theatre in the South West. It has a national reputation for the production of new plays and for the co-production, facilitation and development of internationally renowned dance, drama and musicals. It also provides an extensive creative learning programme to a broad and wide-reaching audience including young people, adults and disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.

Dialogues

Dialogues was the name given to encompass the different strands of the Theatre's work with refugees and asylum seekers in Plymouth. The programme included three groups that met on a weekly basis; Dare to Be Different, Dare to Dazzle and Dove Tales. The work was positioned in a national context of organisations who are successfully using the arts to enhance the health and well-being of refugees and asylum seekers, as well as a tool with which to raise cultural awareness and enhance community cohesion.

Context

The 2001 census showed that only 2% of Plymouth's population were from a black and minority ethnic group, with small numbers representing a wide variety of backgrounds. In July 2002, the Home Office designated Plymouth as a dispersal centre for asylum seekers, which resulted in a sharp increase in the numbers of black, minority and ethnic groups. The city experienced a dramatic change in its demographic in a short space of time, which meant that some communities found it difficult to adjust. It was against this backdrop that in 2004, following conversations with the community cohesion team at the city council and with teachers in local schools, the Theatre Royal Plymouth started to invite refugee and asylum seeker communities and involve them in regular drama and theatre based activities.



The Projects

Dare to be Different

Dare to be Different was the longest running of the three programmes and involved weekly drama workshops for refugees and asylum seekers aged 14+. The programme came to an end in December 2012 after running for a total of nine years. It was latterly funded by The KPMG Foundation and designed to help build the self-confidence of participants, both as individuals and as a group, to enhance their language skills through drama, and to enable participants to meaningfully express their own stories.

Dare to Dazzle

Also funded by The KPMG foundation, Dare to Dazzle was a small group led by a creative practitioner and a family therapist. Its aims were to work with children aged mostly 8 - 11 to help them explore, through drama, issues they may have had with their feelings, experiences, identity and relationships. It also offered an un-intimidating way into involvement with the Theatre. Participants were referred to the group through schools, a range of statutory services and other asylum seeker and refugee agencies.

Dove Tales

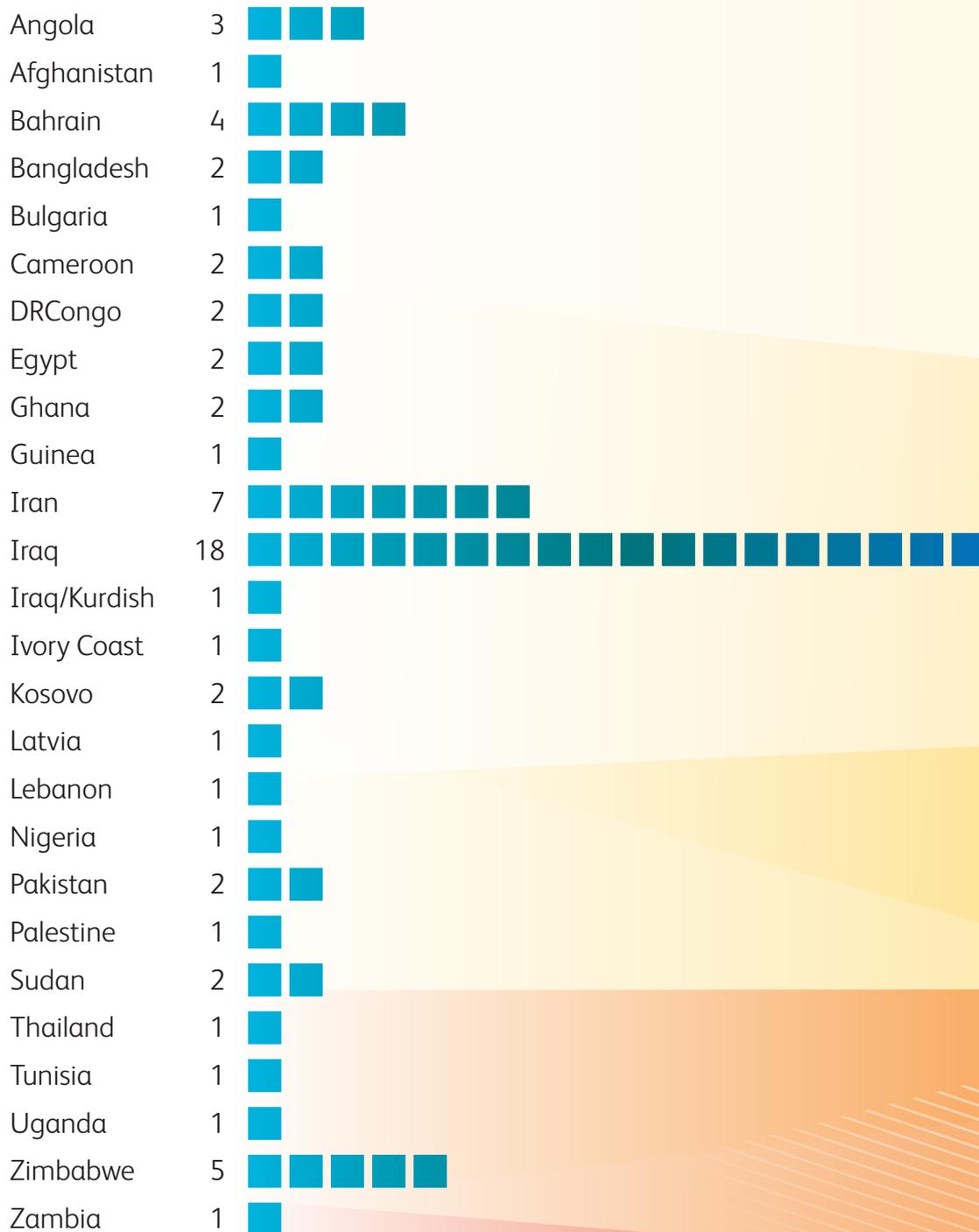
Funded by Comic Relief, Dove Tales was developed in response to visits by the Theatre Royal Plymouth staff to the homes of Dare to Be Different and Dare to Dazzle participants. Staff found that often mothers and other female family members were very socially isolated and in some cases felt unable to access services, or integrate into the wider community in a meaningful way. The group was run in conjunction with the Plymouth and Devon Racial Equality Council. The sessions focussed on sharing experiences, stories and practical advice in a safe and supportive setting. The provision of a creative crèche alongside the Dove Tales group proved vital in enabling the attendance of many of the women who have children.

“When I arrived (in the UK) I encountered discrimination, they supported me through everything.”



Methodologies used for the evaluation included creative group evaluation sessions, case studies and one-to-one interviews and surveys.

A snapshot of data collected from the summer term of 2012 showed that the Dialogues programme engaged with 66 participants from 26 nationalities, with the largest representation from Iraq, Iran and Zimbabwe.



Meeting the aims

Confidence and self-esteem

91% of participants felt that the group helped them to feel good about themselves and 94% of participants said the group helped them to feel more confident.

It was also clear that the enjoyment and opportunity to be part of the groups was a key reason why people attended, with 97% of participants valuing the chance to be part of a group and 97% of participants feeling that they were encouraged within the groups.

“...everything was a problem I couldn't do anything. Now I can catch a bus, go shopping alone, go to the doctor; I do it all alone and I feel very happy and confident.”

Happiness, health and well-being (mental, physical and emotional resilience)

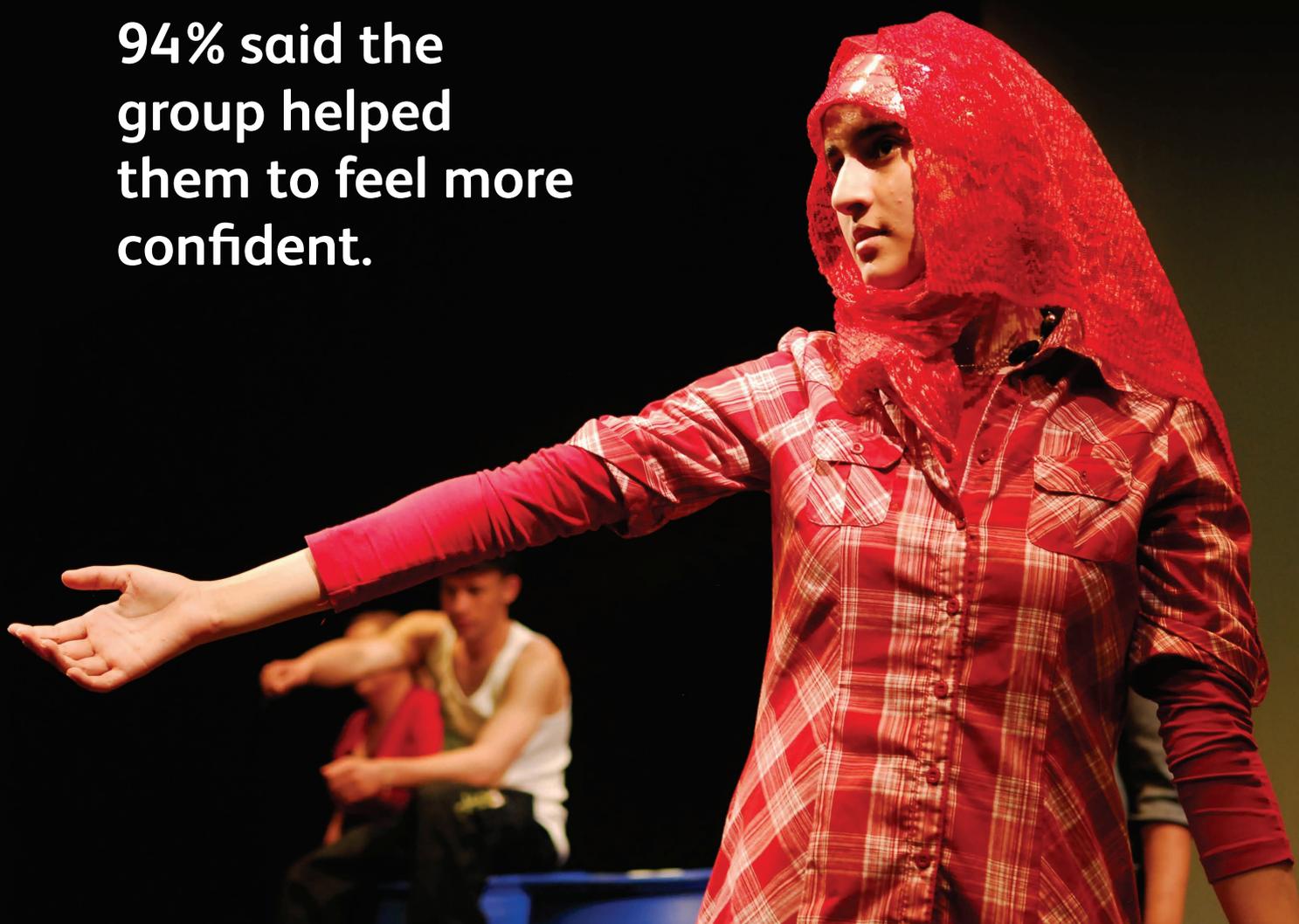
97% of respondents felt that the group had helped them to feel happier with 81% definitely so and only 3% unsure.

85% of participants felt that the activities had helped them to feel less stressed and a further 91% felt that the group helped them to feel healthier.

“It makes me happy that I joined the drama group.”

“It helped me get my confidence, to recognise myself as a human, otherwise I didn't have a clue what to do to be involved in the community here.”

94% said the group helped them to feel more confident.



Communication and language skills

Theatre and drama activities lend themselves to developing confidence in self-expression. For some participants, the opportunity to speak and learn English in a safe and supportive atmosphere proved to be invaluable.

94% of participants felt that being involved in the group had helped them feel more able to communicate and express themselves, with 44% definitely, 50% yes and only 6% unsure.

“They gave us the chance to talk about our feelings and that we are all the same, mothers, sisters, daughters and friends.”

“At first I couldn’t talk with any English people and they (the group) encouraged me to speak and built up my confidence. I couldn’t understand any words and now I can answer these questions confidently and translate for other people.”

76% of participants felt that they were better able to access other services as a result of attending the group.

Community integration and community cohesion, sign-posting, referrals and progression

For many participants the sessions themselves helped to create a positive sense of group identity, with 88% of respondents saying they felt a sense of belonging. 84% of respondents felt they were more interested in learning as a result of attending the groups and 75% felt more ambitious for themselves. A further 76% of participants felt that they were better able to access other services as a result of attending the group.

“Now I know English women who are kind. First time I came here I knew nobody and was very sad, now I am happy.”

“As a result of Dove Tales I now have voluntary work teaching French three days a week in a Primary School.”

“Very grateful for the opportunity I wouldn’t be where I am now without the courage and experience I got from the groups.”





Key Achievements

- The Dialogues programme not only met the project aims, but also demonstrated profound and significantly positive outcomes for participants across all three groups, with a consistently high percentage of participants reporting increases in their confidence and self-esteem.
- There were very positive ratings in the areas of happiness, health and well being, demonstrating the efficacy of the arts and the work of the Theatre Royal Plymouth in this field.
- In the case of Dove Tales specifically, the programme clearly met the needs of women who were not being catered for elsewhere in the city. Dove Tales represented an outstanding example of an arts organisation responding creatively to meet a genuine need and gap in provision.
- The level of sensitivity, building of trust and pastoral care provided by the Dialogues team was exemplary and a notable and distinctive feature of the programme.
- There is evidence that being part of the Dialogues programme was key for some participants in building a sense of citizenship and the confidence to integrate and engage more fully in community life. This included accessing other statutory and non-statutory services, as well as other leisure and cultural opportunities.
- The overall quality of leadership and management, and its impact on the programme, was undoubtedly a key factor in delivering such successful outcomes.

Legacy and Learning

- Although the numbers of people seeking asylum have dropped over recent years, it is evident that there is still a high level of need to develop projects which address integration and community cohesion within the city.
- Partners are keen to see more integrated projects, which address prejudice and lack of cultural awareness. There is potential for these to be developed with greater involvement from refugees and asylum seekers themselves, engaging where possible with smaller grass roots, community refugee and asylum seeker organisations.
- From comparative analysis of outcomes for those engaged over a shorter and longer period of time, the findings clearly indicate that longer-term and more sustained interventions of this nature, although more costly in time and resources, really do pay dividends in terms of successful integration and lasting impact.
- There is a need for future projects of this nature to establish pathways of progression and a positive transition from high level support interventions, to those that require a greater level of independence and self-motivation.
- The geographical location of the sessions at the Theatre's production and learning centre in Cattedown were seen by some as a barrier to successful access, and the resultant taxi fares for participants had significant financial and human resource implications for the Theatre. A more centrally based location, or sessions held in different Plymouth localities might make for a more streamlined model.
- Both Dove Tales and Dare to Dazzle should be further developed and continued as in these cases the Theatre is delivering work to groups that are not being provided for elsewhere in the city.



Case Study

Sarah's Story:

"It's like I found treasure, I was so happy when I found the Dove Tales group." Before Sarah had discovered the group she was isolated at home, feeling depressed and bored and knowing no one but her husband. It had been this way for five months ever since she arrived from Tunisia until a friend of her husband's recommended she went along to try Dove Tales.

Sarah remembers going to the group for the first time and being overjoyed to meet other Arab women, speak her own language and be understood. She was desperate to be involved with others and learn more about Britain and at last she had found a way to do this. Three years later Sarah is a committed member of the group, has a network of friends that she meets outside the group and she knows she always has people to turn to; *"If there is something wrong I am not alone, I have somewhere to go."* The social aspect of the group is so important to Sarah that one of the few changes to the group she would like is for the coffee time to be longer.

Sarah describes how the group has helped her to improve her English and her confidence. When I spoke to her she had just come from giving a presentation in English to a roomful of women about the Dove Tales project and is keen to keep developing her talents. *"This group has helped my confidence, I now know what I want."*

It is only because the group has an integral crèche that Sarah could attend at all. With no other childcare Sarah was always with her two young children with no respite for herself. *"I was having panic attacks and crying, my daughter was always with me and when I first put her in the crèche she would spend two hours crying."* Both the crèche and the parenting support were described glowingly... *"Now I can breathe, I have time for myself, I feel happy and my daughter has changed, she plays with other children and can say 'go mummy', she is more confident too."*

There are still problems that Sarah has to face – she describes the racist looks, behaviour and language she had to contend with when she chose to wear her scarf. The women in the group encouraged her to continue to wear it but in the end Sarah chose not to. One of the most important things about this decision for Sarah was that she felt confident enough to make the choice and know what she wanted.

Sarah describes her hopes for herself, the other group members and the future of the group. *"There is so much talent in the group, women who can paint, women who work with flowers and women who tell stories."* She says it would be good to have someone to help nurture their individual talents, that and to do more activities, sport, swimming and the gym. *"I want to do many, many things: finish my hairdressing, keep learning languages. I want to be a hairdresser or a teacher."*

How important is the group to Sarah? She replies emphatically *"very – it makes me feel good. As a result of Dove Tales I have voluntary work teaching French three days a week in a Primary School. My confidence is growing and I am happy."*

"This group has helped my confidence, I now know what I want."

Case Study

Leontine's Story:

Leontine is 18 and came across Dare to be Different when her father told her about the group. She thought it sounded interesting because it was somewhere she'd learn about different cultures.

"Before I joined the group I used to be a very narrow minded person... I had my own ways of thinking, I didn't have an interest in different types of people... I didn't mix with people of different races and I didn't think outside the box."

Leontine described her first impression of the group. She felt nervous seeing people she knew from school but didn't know that well and didn't know how to socialise with. However, the group made her feel welcome, people were easy to talk to and she said it felt nice, exciting and like she was in the right place.

"At school you stand out... here you know they are not going to judge each other because we are all from different backgrounds." After being in the group for one year Leontine says "I see everyone is one, you shouldn't judge people because of what they look like, accept everyone the way they are and it's ok to be different."

"here you know they are not going to judge each other because we are all from different backgrounds"

Leontine wants to train to be a social worker. When she has qualified and is working she says she will then go on to study further as a Psychologist. She says that being in the group will help her achieve her aims because *"it has helped me socialise with different people."* *"It will help me with social skills and communication skills, not judging other people and treating everyone fairly."* Whilst Leontine knows what she wants to do she thought that having a careers counsellor for the Dare to Be Different group would really help people with opportunities in careers and studying.

What changes would Leontine like to see in the group? *"Maybe instead of having just people from different cultures and countries we could have people from this country (at Dare To Be Different) so that we don't separate us out and that will also help people who are learning English."* She also liked the idea of getting the group together for a whole day from time to time so people could get to know each other better and go on Theatre trips.

Is Dare To Be Different important to Leontine? *"It is. I do kind of base my schedule on it. If it is something to do with my future that is more important but it is good to get out (to Dare To Be Different) and if you are going through problems it is a good way to forget your problems for a short period."*

Leontine said that she knew money was short in the current climate. *"I want to say thank you to the Theatre Royal and the people who support the group for giving their time and money and giving opportunity to young people."*





The Theatre Royal Plymouth would like to thank all of the participants, staff, partners, stakeholders and funders, who have played such an important part in making the Dialogues programme so successful.



The Baring Foundation



Supported using public funding by
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