

Creative Case North- use of Creative Case North Bursary by Sage Gateshead; January-March 2016.

Founded in 2004, Sage Gateshead combines performance and participation across a wide range of musical genres, with one of the largest music Learning & Participation programmes in the UK, a wide programme of concerts and festivals and one of the biggest conference venues in the region. It is the home of Royal Northern Sinfonia, the UK's only full-time contract chamber orchestra, and a folk development agency, Folkworks. Through the Bursary, we set out to establish a cross-organisation framework for developing the Creative Case at Sage Gateshead with a 10-year view, focusing initially on the area of disability. This should help us:

- Draw the different areas of our programme together
- Communicate a shift to our audiences, ourselves, our stakeholders
- Adapt our practice
- Change our relationship with our audiences.

The Activity

At the heart of the programme was a series of visits/discussions by key contributors. We took advice from Jo Verrent of Unlimited Commissions and Ruth Gould of DadaFest in Liverpool (both at the suggestion of ACE North), who presented their own work and ran staff roundtable discussions. Jo also did an excellent all-staff presentation on the topic of disability. In addition, we met with Rebecca Dawson of Candoco, who presented and then led another discussion. We also ran two Vision 2025 sessions, led by Dawn Williams, for the RNS and staff, with the topic of disability threaded through the meetings. Clarence Adoo, our Orchestral Animateur, himself disabled, visited a youth ensemble for young people with disabilities in Liverpool, to which we were introduced by Ruth Gould. A session with Danny Lane of Music and the Deaf is in the process of being arranged.



Candoco Dance Company

Learning and Insight

- That we could make powerful public statements through productions involving both disabled and non-disabled performers (to be explored via a possible joint Candoco/RNS project), as well as simply presenting/commissioning excellent performers/creators with disabilities—quality is the key.
- That we have a duty to help develop more performers with disabilities for the concert stage – in orchestras and other genres – so entry points are imperative. We therefore need to provide musical progression routes for participants with disabilities – from young people onwards, through being more inclusive in our Foundation Learning programme and Centre for Advanced Training plus other entry points. We need to include this in our 10-year vision and identify what steps/resources are needed.
- That we need to accommodate current and future staff with impairments – whether stated or not – and place our Equality and Diversity Working Group at the heart of the organisation with clearer purpose, new leadership and greater buy-in. Our exploration of disability has started to reveal the depth and complexity of the issues – we also need to adopt an appropriate timescale so as to get things right. We need to give more

Creative Case NORTH

consideration to areas that can and should be creatively led by people with disabilities – there are currently no areas within our organisation that are disability-led. Through Jo and Ruth’s presentations (both of whom are deaf) we gained some knowledge of the issues in regard to deaf audiences and what approaches we may need to take regarding Hearing Loops/signing/captioning – some of which will also be of benefit to our aging audience.

Impact

- The all-staff briefing by Jo Verrent was very positively received, and it was also recorded for wider dissemination and potentially as part of future staff inductions.
- The raised awareness of our interest in presenting product featuring artists with disabilities has already resulted in our grasping a number of opportunities offered to us. Hence we are presenting a performance and workshops by Music and the Deaf entitled “4orte: Championing Performances by Deaf Musicians” on June 1 and also the disabled DJ/rapper Billy Saga from Brazil in Sept 2016. We are also in discussion with Hearing Fund UK about a possible fundraising summer gala event in July 2016. We will be looking for further opportunities to present artists with disabilities including Sarah Fisher, a graduate of one of our degree courses who has cerebral palsy, and has developed her own performance.



Creative Case NORTH



- We have revisited the leadership and make-up of our Equality and Diversity Action Group, with a series of meetings in the diary. We have also started cross-departmental discussions about the quality of our infra-red loop provision for hearing-impaired people and the need for improvement, and about how we develop the quality and amount of information on our website for people with disabilities.
- In meetings with Higher Education colleagues (Newcastle and Northumbria Universities) recently we have highlighted our interest in any research being done in these areas; with Northumbria we are exploring the idea of a Festival of Melancholia which would include exploration of issues around mental health and depression.
- We are now considering how more detailed work we have done on disability can be extended to ethnicity, gender and other protected characteristics, along with mental health. For example, although gender has not been a focus, the process of looking at our activity through the lens of disability issues, has raised questions in other areas – such as why there are fewer women composers and conductors represented in our classical programme? Audience development and monitoring of the ethnic mix of audiences is also an area for development nationally. We wish to improve our ability to monitor audiences and have consulted briefly with peers as to their approaches, but have not yet found anyone using sophisticated methods. This feels like something the arts sector overall needs to tackle and share best practice in, otherwise how can we know if we are succeeding?

Ros Rigby/Chris Pentney. April 8 2016



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