

Case studies: How can the arts and creativity support people who are shielding or vulnerable during Covid-19?

Organisation: Intermission Youth

Region: Greater London

Introduction

Two or three weeks before lockdown began, we started to think about creative ways to engage with our young people. These are the outputs we have achieved during C-19:

- Daily online **pre-recorded video workshops** for both our youth theatre cohort members and our graduates, covering: movement, voice, well-being/meditation, yoga and writing.
- Weekly online **pre-recorded Question Time videos** in which industry leaders answer questions asked by our young people and graduates, including: Oscar-winning actor Sir Mark Rylance; award-winning actor and Intermission Youth Patron Naomie Harris; RSC director Robin Belfield; theatre critic & broadcaster Libby Purves; Royal Court director Ola Ince; *Call the Midwife* actor Jenny Agutter; *EastEnders* actor Rudolph Walker. All are password protected so they are only available to our young people.

'I'd have had nothing to do, no hope and been bored if we hadn't had this. When I do come online and get involved, I come away feeling better. But I just want to go back to normal Intermission.'

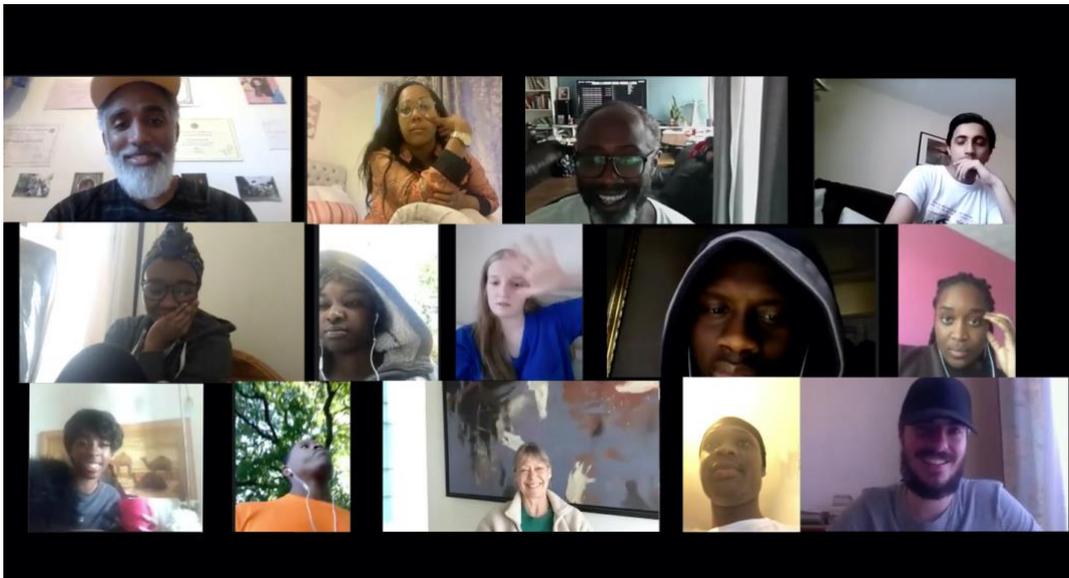


Image: Zoom rehearsal of *The Tempest*, copyright Ariel Films

- Weekly online **Chill 'n Chat** nights when the young people come into a safe online space to chill out, chat and be together, given they can't meet face-to-face as a group/family.
- Weekly **Saturday Watch Together**, giving them a chance to come together online to watch a short film (in which some of our graduates took part), recordings of our youth theatre productions in which they featured, films, etc. An opportunity to relax together.
- **An online Zoom production over 2 evenings: Shakespeare's Monologue Slams**, in which 16 members of our youth theatre cohort and graduates created and rehearsed a

Shakespeare monologue, re-imagined in their culture and fusing Shakespeare's original text with current slang. They received coaching from members of our team and RSC actors (offered pro bono by the RSC). They performed in front of a panel (Sir Mark Rylance, actor Jenny Agutter, director & IY graduate Abigail Sewell and actor Paapa Essiedu) who provided feedback after each short performance, and in front of a public audience of around 150 each evening. Both evenings were recorded and uploaded onto our YouTube channel, which have had around 1,000 views. The event was financially supported by Sir Mark Rylance

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbqNE1jzAYsLAa6Jp72W1rQ>

- Weekly **online rehearsals of *The Tempest***. Around 18 members of the youth theatre cohort attend Zoom rehearsals to develop an Intermission-version of *The Tempest*. This originally started with face-to-face workshops/rehearsals in February, but had to go onto Zoom during lockdown. Originally intended to be performed at Omnibus Theatre in Clapham in November, we are looking at how we might perform it in a site-specific location in front of a small audience (complying with government guidelines) to create a special theatrical experience for our young performers and audience members.
- We have just launched the **Intermission Film Festival** in which we have invited youth theatre cohort members and graduates to produce a short (5 minute) film, in production groups of up to 6 (following government guidelines), shot on iPhone/android. The only requirement of the film is that it's to include one line of Shakespeare. The young people will create their own stories, likely to feature what they have experienced during Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement. The films will be showcased over two nights in September, in front of a judging panel of: Sir Mark Rylance, award-winning director Peter Kosminsky, and acclaimed US actor André Holland. It will definitely be shown via Zoom, but may also have a few 'live' audience members, depending on what we are allowed to do in September.
- An online Zoom **Scratch Night** in which about 12-18 of our youth theatre cohort members and graduates will perform in front of their peers (ie a closed audience) mid-July (singing, rap, spoken word...).
- A daily 10-minute **workout challenge**, helping the young people to keep fit.
- A fun **Bards Beat** video to celebrate Shakespeare's birthday in April, in which Intermission Youth team, young people and friends of Intermission took part in an 'iambic pentameter' rhythm challenge. Each person recorded themselves and it was edited into two segments and sent out on Twitter as part of the RSC's *#ShareyourShakespeare* day. See 'Links' below.
- Five of our young people were selected to be writers for a development film **Hear My Voice**, (a Billy Elliot story for opera turned on its head) - a co-production with 1961 Productions and Royal Opera House. They applied for the roles and are being paid for their work. This has been a great encouragement to those of our young people who are developing script writing skills. This followed a successful Kickstarter funding appeal which raised £20,000 for script development.
https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/hearmyvoice2020/hear-my-voice?ref=project_link
- **Ongoing 1:1 support & mentoring** via phone. Regular phone calls have been a highly important aspect of our work, as demonstrated by a recent survey carried out on our behalf by Relationships Foundation.

Funders

The Golden Bottle Trust; the Bishop Radford Trust; Sir Mark Rylance; donors & supporters.

Who is it for?

Intermission Youth works predominantly (although not exclusively) with young people between 16-25 from the BAME community who are vulnerable, at risk and from socio-economically challenging backgrounds. We work with people of all faiths and none.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

- **Well-being:** We were concerned to support our young people during this time, many of whom felt lonely, anxious, were losing confidence, suffering depression and suicidal thoughts.
- **Supporting physical health:** the daily 10-minute workout challenge has proven very popular with the young people and has been important in giving them focus and motivation whilst maintaining or improving their physical fitness.
- **Self-expression:** we needed to provide creative opportunities for them to express how they were/are feeling during this period. We did this through our *Chill 'n Chat* evenings, 1:1 phone calls and creative/performance opportunities. As well as C-19, the death of George Floyd and the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement have had an incredibly challenging impact on our young people who are working out how to express and articulate their feelings.
- **Being part of the changing culture:** [this has arisen particularly in the wake of the George Floyd murder/BLM movement]. We are creating Roundtable discussions (with 8 of our graduates/youth theatre cohort members) to meet with arts and industry leaders, in order for them to hear the voices of young BME people – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds – as to how society and industry need to change and provide access to young, diverse people for whom doors do not automatically open.

Where is it happening?

Predominantly Greater London. But we are looking to work with youth theatres in other parts of the UK (Coventry, Northampton, Reading). We also reach young people in other parts of the country through our schools work, our work with the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance, as a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company's Associate Schools programme.

Are you working in partnership?

Our theatre partners include: Shakespeare's Globe, the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), National Theatre. Our drama school partners include: Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA), London Academy of Music & Art (LAMDA). Educational partners include: Uxbridge High School, Harlington School, Tunmarsh PRU and a number of schools in central London. Our criminal justice partnerships include: National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance (NCJAA), Feltham Young Offender Institution. [We were developing a good partnership with G4S to create a pilot educational project at one of their prisons when Covid-19 hit].

During the Covid-19 period, we have continued to be in conversation with our theatre partners. Obviously live arts have been adversely affected by the pandemic.

Our work in schools has halted during the coronavirus although we are now discussing with Tunmarsh PRU delivering a programme of online and workshop activity from September.

We have participated in online conversations with NCJAA and theatre partners of the RSC Associate Schools programme.

How many people took/are taking part?

This year, we have 27 engaged young people who regularly take part in events and programmes – including during Covid-19.

[In 2019 we had 40 young people on our IYT programme but reduced the number this year due to this year of transition as we become a new entity with a new home].

We have around 100 graduates who engage at different levels depending on the programme and their time commitments. We have continued to engage with many of our graduates during the Covid-19 period and have included them in a range of online activities and conversations.

For how long has it been happening?

Intermission Youth Theatre began in 2008 and is ongoing – even through Covid-19.

The graduate programme is ongoing.

Our community engagement programme began in 2013 and is ongoing, although our face-to-face work naturally came to a halt during the pandemic. We are looking to start this again, adhering to ongoing government guidelines, in September 2020.

What were/are the main outputs?

See introduction, above.

Evaluation:

The **Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Survey**, conducted in June 2020, shows that on average, the mental well-being of the Intermission Youth cohort members who completed the measure (25 out of 26 surveys distributed), is below what would be expected of a random sample of the UK population:

- 13 respondents scored in the lowest 25% of the population for mental well-being;
- 5 more scored below-average;
- 7 scored above average

Given the societal challenges posed by Covid-19 and the murder of George Floyd, this suppression of well-being is perhaps to be expected.

The **Intermission Youth activity survey**, conducted in June 2020, shows that activities in which the cohort could interact socially with one another and with members of the team were valued over organised activity:

- Being able to talk to staff members on the phone was rated most highly (total score 121)
- Saturday's Watch Together (score 97)
- Chill 'n Chat & video workshops (score 88 & 86 respectively)
- Shakespeare Monologue Slam and Question Time episodes (equal score 79)
- The Tempest rehearsals (score 73. NB a smaller number of cohort members are involved in these)

The **Intermission Youth Feelings survey** shows that:

- The cohort misses meeting in person: 19 Strongly Agree; 6 Agreed

- The cohort feels supported by Intermission Youth: 12 Strongly Agree; 12 Agree; 1 Disagree
- Intermission Youth helps the cohort to cope with anxiety: 8 Strongly Agree; 13 Agree; 4 Disagree
- Without Intermission, members of the cohort wouldn't be in contact with many other people: 7 Strongly Agree; 10 Agree; 7 Disagree; 1 Strongly Disagree
- Planned events have kept the cohort motivated: 12 Strongly Agree; 11 Agree; 2 Disagree

*The surveys were carried out on behalf of Intermission Youth by **Relationships Foundation, June 2020.***

Feedback:

'I've really enjoyed the content. They kept us all connected. They've given me something to focus on and help to keep up my acting skills.' [Jaspreet Bance]

'I'd have had nothing to do, no hope and been bored if we hadn't had this. When I do come online and get involved, I come away feeling better. But I just want to go back to normal Intermission.' [Pia Somersby]

'The Tempest rehearsals have been my highlight. They allow me to work towards something. I see familiar faces. I create something practical. Even in a period of unknown, this has been a continuity, an anchor, which has given me structure every Monday.' [Stevanie Matthews]

'I can watch a few videos and get motivated because they are always available online. They're my lifeline.' [Elijah Blunt]

'I've liked the debates on Chill 'n Chat. It opens you up to other ways of thinking.'

What have been the challenges and successes for you?

Challenges:

- keeping the young people motivated
- keeping our young people engaged
- mental health and well-being as many of the group have experienced depression during lockdown
- financial struggles faced by the young people
- not being able to physically see and hug our young people
- working remotely as a team and not having our ongoing team interaction
- quickly learning new online skills to set up content, create Vimeo and YouTube channels etc

Successes:

- maintaining regular contact with all our young people (Zoom, phone calls, WhatsApp groups)
- creation of online content
- regular 'live' events and sessions with the young people
- 10-minute daily workout challenge
- working remotely as a team!
- quickly learning new online skills!

Further information

Intermission Youth website: www.intermissionyouththeatre.co.uk

Intermission Youth YouTube Channel: *Shakespeare's Monologue Slams*:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbqNE1jzAYsLAa6Jp72W1rQ>

Bard Beats on Twitter (3,000 views)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=YWtXMmgPUvU&app=desktop>

Intermission Youth transforms vulnerable young people living in deprivation and experiencing anti-social behaviour, family breakdown, dependency and criminality. Through support, care and drama, they gain the confidence to make positive choices that change the course of their lives.

Intermission Youth Theatre is a 10-month programme for 16-25 year olds that develops creativity, life skills and self-expression. Many go on to work in theatre, TV and film.

Our **community engagement** in schools, PRUs, young offender institutions and prisons, provides drama workshops, theatre games and peer-to-peer conversations.

Our **graduate programme** offers professional and personal development, as well challenging representation of BAME within the industry and society.

Intermission Youth Theatre (IYT) was established in 2008 as a youth project within The Parish of Holy Trinity and St Saviour, Upper Chelsea, in the Diocese of London. Due to the expansion of its programme, **Intermission Youth** has been established as a newly-formed charitable company to enable the project to enter a new chapter as an independent entity for the benefit of its future operational and development needs.

Intermission Youth is a charitable company limited by guarantee (awaiting registration by the Charity Commission) with 5 employees.