



## ANNUAL REPORT OF ACTIVITIES 2019 – 20

Playback Theatre advanced **social inclusion** and **promoted equality and diversity** through project work and public performances.

With a current trend towards **tribal polarisation** the Playback Theatre method is remarkable as people really listen to each other during a performance. This method is making a multi-layered significant contribution to **tolerance and understanding** and is especially helpful where there is much diversity within a community.

### Summary 2019-20

Project with **young carers** involved a first ever respite residential weekend in South Hams.

Long term ongoing project work with **women refugees and asylum seekers** in Plymouth has shown attendance growing exponentially during this period. 858 attendances over 23 sessions with women from 24 different countries formed friendships of support and social integration.

**Community resilience** has grown where local performances have offered a space for difficult and taboo subjects to be discussed and explored in a non-judgemental and open setting. Airing taboo themes can ease stigma and shame. 830 people attended 20 public performances in Devon.

We have established and support a **new community theatre company** training them in Playback method with 10 members continuing their development from past training courses who are committed to supporting local community development.

We provided training for Playback Theatre practitioners with School of Playback Theatre UK to develop their skills and attended peer supervision for Accredited Trainers to share good practice.

The main activities of the charity are overseen and approved by the Trustees to ensure they are in accordance with the declaration issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions we had to cancel project work and public performances since 17th March 2020.



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### ***Supporting Young Carers***

Seven years of planning and development through a range of sessions and discussions with the young people and planning with Torbay Young Carers working with them culminated in a residential respite weekend that we planned and ran for 8 Young Carers aged between 11-16 years in partnership with Torbay Young Carers organization with the aim to support and strengthen Young Carers in their lives at home and school.

This was an immensely successful weekend because the essential elements came together to support these young people in a well-balanced collaboration. Ashburton Cookery School provided all the catering and all the food was donated by their supporters. The young people were given a cookery lesson and were able to take home the food they'd cooked as well as a recipe book. Theatre games were played to break down barriers and help the young people to feel at home. The Playback Theatre performances were at the heart of the weekend and were an opportunity for a deep sharing and understanding of the complex and challenging life situations these young people live. A junk sculpture workshop and a walk in the grounds helped to process and integrate all that had been shared. Support workers were the key link between the young people and the interventions being offered to make the weekend a very safe as well as supportive and fun time. The residential venue was a very homely setting and was offered at a discounted price. The young carers had a chance to unburden themselves of their responsibilities and pressures in life and feedback from Torbay Young Carers indicated that this was the most successful intervention they had been part of and a strong sense that this should become a regular part of their programme. Sadly, due to Covid 19 restrictions we have not been able to organize that yet.

*“Playback sessions strengthens them (young carers) by taking part in a bigger context and seeing others’ stories. They’ve seen others are doing it and still standing”* **Angela Poole, Support worker Torbay Young Carers.**

### ***Supporting Refugees***

Attendance gained huge momentum during this year in the **Refugee Women’s Creative Group**. Refugee women built strong friendships across diverse backgrounds, improved their spoken English, grew in confidence and became less isolated and more socially integrated. This affected their family members positively as the mothers were strengthened and supported. 24 sessions in total were attended by an average of 37 women per session and 5 undergraduate students on work placement at Students and Refugees Together organisation.



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Women attending come from Afghanistan, South Sudan, Sudan, Nepal, Iraq, Pakistan, Kurdistan, Syria, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, India, Nigeria, Brazil, Yemen, Burma, Ghana, Turkey, Eritrea, Azerbaijan, China, Somalia, Bulgaria, Ivory Coast and Bangladesh. They come together enabled to share stories of their cultural backgrounds, their arrival in UK and how they manage their integration into their new lives. The attending placement students on courses at Plymouth University were from Germany, Norway, France, Ireland and UK also participated and were supported to learn about the current situation of refugees settling into Plymouth and UK. They also participated and were supported to learn about the current situation of refugees settling into Plymouth and UK. Here are some words from women attendees and START manager.

*'All week I think about and worry about my family, then I come to the women's group and my mind is changed. It changes how I feel'* **Refugee woman**

*'Your acting gives us encouragement and keeps us strong'* **Asylum seeker**

*'When I came I couldn't speak English. I come every Tuesday and it helps me. Now I want to have more English lessons to get even better'* **Asylum seeker**

*'Some stories are happy some are sad. Many are sad, it lets us understand each other's feelings. It's good to have interaction with each others feelings.'* **Asylum seeker**

*'Having the playback sessions has helped women find a voice and feel that they are valued. As the women take charge of what they want to share people feel safe to discuss any area and not pressured. Running the sessions as a block has really helped the women as they know what to expect at each session and this is also helpful to our planning.'* **Susie Dent, Manager at START (Students and Refugees Together) Charity**

**Student volunteers** face many challenges working with refugees and providing support to their clients. We provided **team-building sessions** supporting them with the difficult emotions arising from this work so they are better equipped to support these vulnerable people and offer a welcoming environment for the women and children in the women's creative groups.

On **International Women's Day** Playback Theatre facilitated a process for refugee women to share their stories on the theme of Be Bold For Change. Building on the success of this day



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we are now involved in a steering group with refugee women and Plymouth and Devon Racial Equality Council to ensure the continuity of this event and more.

### ***Supporting Women***

Women's issues were brought to life by Tarte Noire Women's Playback Theatre Company to support women in 12 regular local performances in South Hams and Exeter. These performances, held in an all women's space, offered insight and support for women audiences through the process of sharing of life experiences. Feedback repeatedly highlighted ways women's voices have been strengthened through taking part in our performances and open rehearsals and being part of a supportive local group. Performances themes this year have been '**Dreams**' '**Rebellion and Obedience** (Summer 2019) '**Jealousy, Rage and Forgiveness** (Autumn 2019) '**Ruptured Lives** (Spring 2020) and '**Be Bold for Change**' for International Women's Day.

*'Extraordinary evening. Whole landscapes of emotion brought vividly alive by you. Nuanced, rich, moving.'* **Audience member**

*'It was very psycho-magical and therapeutic and at the same time full of humour and beauty. Feminine sensitivity at its most delicious diversity and depth. A gift to see you.'* **Audience member**

*'Wow, what a powerful moment of truth and liberation.'* **Audience member**

*"Very touching, professional, a deep and unexpected experience that will stay with me."* **Audience member**

### ***Supporting Community***

Community performances have supported emotional release and unburdening has taken place within the community and people have offered advice and support for each other by sharing their own experiences.

We were invited by **Extinction Rebellion, Devon for Europe and Totnes Alive festival** to enable conversations within their community that were attended by large numbers of local people. People who had seen our performances were interested to use our methodology as a way of engaging and exploring different angles with their community groups. A key role in



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Playback Method is the role of conductor, the person in the group who holds the space to encourage and facilitate involvement by those attending.

**Devon for Europe** performance supported those who had been campaigning.

In collaboration with **Extinction Rebellion** we performed in London in the Wellbeing tent for those who had been protesting for many days and gave them an opportunity to reflect together and encourage each other to be strong and carry on. This was followed by a performance for Extinction Rebellion Totnes for 100 people to reflect and remember together, enabling conversations within their community.

Mirror Mirror and Tarte Noire collaborated to encourage and inspire members of the public to take action for the benefit of their community and the planet at the **Totnes Alive** festival.

We supported a **40<sup>th</sup> birthday event** for family and friends, which gave everyone a chance to come together to celebrate.

*'It's truly awe inspiring to experience the magic of people being so deeply seen and heard'*  
**Audience member**

*Very moving. You have helped me so much with my story. Thank you for connecting us all together. It was beyond my wildest dreams'* **Audience member**

**A new community network** has formed in Totnes, with core support from the Town Council and a range of community groups, which supported a large community consultation event where a local strategy for **Climate Change** was developed.

*'Can't believe that this is a 'First' Playback Theatre performance. Great chemistry between the actors, great energy! All the best - and good luck for future performances. Very well done.'* **Audience member**

*Thank you for your courage, generosity and life force. Beautiful hearts – a gift to us all.'*  
**Audience member**

*Even though I didn't share my story, another person shared exactly what I was dealing with regarding change ... but inside myself I feel acceptance of who I am. Thanks so much. I feel warmed up.'* **Audience member**

### **Training**



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In collaboration with UK School of Playback Theatre our Artistic Directors delivered two Level 2 training weekends, 'Facets of the Story' and 'Attending to the Social Dimension'. 24 people from across the world participated as part of a year-long practitioner training.

Local training in Playback Theatre was delivered in affiliation with Centre for Playback Theatre and the UK School of Playback Theatre at Level 1 and Level 2. 'Role of the Conductor' weekend developed local practitioners skills and Level 1 over 10 weeks introduced Playback Theatre to a new group of 10. This group intends to form a new community Playback Theatre Company responding to community issues locally. As accredited trainers the artistic directors teach ethics and good practice in Playback Theatre, develop performance skills and build confidence for participants

*'Alison and Amanda created a supportive learning environment that allowed us to take emotional and physical risks to contribute to our own and each other's learning.'* **Participant**

*Alison and Amanda expertly scaffolded our knowledge and skills through simple games that led to more complex tasks. We felt competent and successful in our public performance. This speaks volumes about how successful the training and content were.'* **Participant**

*'Alison and Amanda were a great team. There was a great mixture and learning, warmth and encouragement. They strived to help us understand but were also deeply mindful of all the stories and needs that arose. They were clear with feedback when necessary and encouraging in equal measures. We laughed a lot and sessions that were deeply intense were dealt with great understanding and sensitivity. I always felt safe and cared for in their guidance and it was lovely to work with two leaders who are truly there for the work and help others on their journey.'* **Participant**

We hosted a training weekend for our local groups and people from Europe to develop conducting skills in partnership with UK School of Playback Theatre. The weekend was run by accredited trainers and attended by 20 participants.

Tarte Noire women's company ongoing training involved 3 weekends and day long workshops and a special guest from Australia gave an evening workshop.

### **Short term projects**

In December 2019 our artistic directors went to Bangalore, India to run a three-day workshop at the international Playback Theatre Conference. 26 women participated in a



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hugely successful exploration of women's lives from across the world. Women representatives from 18 different countries came together and were strengthened by this meeting.

Two pre conference workshops for a local theatre company exploring gender issues and the stigma and social impact of practicing theatre in India were well received.

The artistic directors were also invited to Colombo, Sri Lanka to deliver a workshop for a Playback Theatre company to grow and develop their skills and interpersonal relationships.

In June 2019 the artistic directors delivered an introduction to Playback Theatre over 6 days in Spain.

### ***Supervision***

Supervision for projects involving vulnerable groups and addressing psychological issues that may arise for participants, audiences and company members supports the ethics and good practice of PTSW activities.

This is fulfilled by ongoing monthly supervision for Artistic Directors, a qualified quarterly supervision specific to refugees and asylum seekers and an annual review with the manager of START. Artistic directors also attend peer supervision with Torbay Young Carers and lead peer supervision with UK Playback Theatre Leaders. Artistic Directors provide ongoing support for company members involved in projects and performances.