Positive Stories For Negative Times

SEASON ONE: IMPACT REPORT

Prepared by Wonder Fools in July 2021. For more information contact Executive Producer Steph Connell at steph@wonderfools.org.
THE PROJECT

Positive Stories for Negative Times is an innovative and exciting project produced in association with the Traverse Theatre. It allows young people to participate in creative activities despite the long lasting challenges produced by the 2020 pandemic, it creates a space and a process for them to make new work online or live in the space if government guidelines allow. The project inaugural season took place August 2020 - July 2021.

SEASON ONE:

3,000 audience members (and counting)
2,703 young participants
282 groups
119 organisations
57 schools
40 people trained in digital safeguarding
27 organisations trained
8 countries
7 new plays commissioned
3 new team members

BACKGROUND:

The project was born from consultation with young people and responded to the lack of physical spaces for young people to participate in creative activities and the detrimental impact that this was having on young people's mental health and wellbeing. The past eighteen months has been a time of huge anxiety and increased loneliness, only amplified by the uncertainty of what the future holds for young people.

The first lockdown had a detrimental impact on support networks for young people, making them fragile and often unsustainable online. Wonder Fools saw that some youth groups were struggling to maintain and provide their crucial services due to a lack of training and support in working digitally. Positive Stories for Negative Times was created to combat all these things by working with struggling organisations by giving them training, a handbook on creative digital practices and a play to perform – all for free.

"I learnt that we can always be creative, not matter what… When we were making the play I felt like it changed my life."

Josh, Triple Act Theatre, Ardrossan
THE PLAYS:

Wonder Fools commissioned some of the UK’s most exciting voices to write 5 new plays for young people:

**IS THIS A FAIRYTALE?** by Bea Webster, 8 - 12yrs

**THE PACK** by Stef Smith, 14yrs +

**HOLD OUT YOUR HAND** by Chris Thorpe, 14yrs +

**OZYMANDIAS** by Jack Nurse and Robbie Gordon, 16yrs +

**BAD BORED WOMEN OF THE ROOMS** by Sabrina Mahfouz, 18 yrs +

The playwrights’ only brief was to create something that will bring young people together and give them a shared experience of making something new and exciting. The plays were suitable to any group working with young people no matter their size or their experience of making theatre.

THE PROCESS:

The plays were written specifically for the times we are living in and the project was completely free to participating groups between the ages of 8 and 25, from September 2020—July 2021. Groups were then sent the handbook of exercises and guidance alongside their chosen plays. As well as regular opportunities to meet peers and share their work and challenges.

The end goal of the project was for participating groups to record and upload their performances to our interactive map, which shares and celebrates all the brilliant work from young people across the UK and beyond.

The geographical reach of the project has been remarkable – and surpassed any initial hopes of being made specifically for groups in Scotland. Young people participated from across Scotland, England, Spain, Sweden, Canada, Delhi, the Hebrides and many, many more including rural locations and the Scottish islands.

"When this came along we were all grabbing as something new to focus on. It was great for the morale of the group and to find new ways to work together even though we were spread around the UK."

Noah, Aberdeen Performing Arts
PARTICIPATING GROUPS:

A huge variety of groups signed up to participate – from youth theatres and youth groups to schools and charities.

Amongst these groups was the Yard Young People’s Theatre at the New Art Exchange (Nottingham). This group worked in the surrounding areas with young people living in challenging socio-economic backgrounds. Likewise, Thunk-It Theatre worked with the charity Kyra, a women’s project in York who’s focus is to provide a safe, non-judgmental space to support woman as well as offering a variety of creative and wellbeing focused opportunities. 57 schools took part including those based in Somerset, London, Salford, Yorkshire, Wiltshire and from Edinburgh to Angus, as well as Alicante (Spain), Laholm (Sweden) and Quebec (Canada). Some schools got whole year groups involved and worked across departments.

Wonder Fools also worked with students at St Roch’s Secondary School Deaf Unit, Glasgow, where we created both a performance and a documentary for the young people.

THE RESPONSE:

"I found it uplifting and motivating, it gave me something to look forward to and also dress up nice for which really made me feel good about myself after a year of pjs and joggers. Every little thing affected me during lockdown and this project was all positive."

Andromeda, hidden route theatre company, Dundee

"Being a part of this project made me feel empowered to be a teenager in these times, as over the past year everyone has had to overcome something, especially teenagers, and the way we have all collectively decided to stand up for what we believe in shows through in this play."

Luke, Harlow College, Essex
"I feel really really strong and I feel confident and happy now."
Teegan, St Roch’s Secondary School Deaf Unit

The project has received some substantial media coverage ranging from the STV news to local press. In the Dunfermline Press, Mix Up Theatre’s participation in the project was profiled:

Mix Up Theatre’s director, Stewart McLaren, said it was a “thoroughly exciting and engaging project” for his company to be part of. “Despite restrictions, our students have created a wonderfully-complex, mature and very relevant piece of art that looks into the mental health and wellbeing of young people through this challenging past year,”

“Positive Stories for Negative Times is a wonderful project providing a platform for young peoples’ creativity and engagement at a time when they need it most. The coronavirus pandemic has limited their lives and their opportunities through the impact of lockdown and ongoing restrictions, not least through the closures of theatres and other creative venues. This Wonder Fools project gives them back the chance to both create their own work and engage with professionals in the industry. It is innovative and exciting in its design and we are thrilled to be able to participate.”

Suzie Lundy, Teacher, The Royal High School, Edinburgh
“You see them go from being some kids that won’t even walk into the building because they’re that scared, and now they are in room with all their friends creating a piece of work that they are not only performing in but that they made themselves. It’s brilliant.”

Mhairi Quinn, Teacher, St Roch’s Secondary School Deaf Unit

“I believe we discovered skills within the group that we would not have if we had been working in our usual way. We found members who can write music, who can choreograph, who can draw, who can sing and we developed a strong sense of team through the need to effectively communicate in new ways.”

Judith Stephen, Group Leader, Aberdeen Performing Arts Young Company

“Using the plays as a vehicle to have conversations about emotions, young people, stress and social media, mental health etc. had a very strong effect on the feeling in the room - they bonded and discussed quickly and had very open conversations.”

Sarah Crabb, Teacher, Grove Academy, Dundee

WHAT NEXT:

Due to the success of Season 1, Season 2 of the project was launched in June 2021 and will continue until March 2022. This season we have commissioned seven playwrights and will be creating work for 6 – 25 year olds. Groups are invited to use the plays as a stimulus to respond to however they wish. Submissions will include performances, artwork, films, music, audio plays, poems, and creative pledges to make the world a better place. We hope that this season will inspire even more creativity than the last. We have also created a Youth Board made up of 20 young people from across Scotland who are now at the centre of the project.

If you’d like to learn more about the project and how you can support our work, please contact Producer Steph Connell at steph@wonderfools.org.
Positive Stories for Negative Times Season One was produced by Wonder Fools in association with the Traverse Theatre with support from SCVO Wellbeing Fund, Garfield Weston Foundation, Foundation Scotland Response Fund, The Brunton, the Corra Foundation, Renfrewshire Leisure and Future Paisley.