

Evaluating the impact
on children and young
people in care of
participating in *City of
One* – a theatre and
music initiative.

Evaluating the impact on children and young people in care of participating in *City of One* - a theatre and music initiative

January 2008

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The logo for the Centre for Public Health Research is a red square with white text. The text is arranged in four lines: "Centre for", "P u b l i c", "H e a l t h", and "R e s e a r c h".

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P u b l i c
H e a l t h
R e s e a r c h

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of the young people and their carers who took the time to take part in our observations, interviews and discussions as part of this evaluation. The stories told of young people's resilience and creative developments were inspirational. Special thanks also go to Heather Williams and Hilary Davis from Myrtle Theatre Company for their generous practical support in making the evaluation happen. Their unfailing commitment to the young people involved in the development and performance of *City of One* was characterised in an open and reflective approach that welcomed this evaluation and its recommendations. Thanks also go to the Government Office for the South West for their encouragement as commissioners of this work.

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Photography by Graham Burke Photography (www.grahamburke.co.uk)

ISBN: 978-1-86043-424-2

Published by the University of the West of England, Bristol

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Executive Summary

Overview of the project

City of One is a play with music which was researched, commissioned and given a professional production by Myrtle Theatre Company at the Tobacco Factory Theatre, Bristol in September 2007. The play explores the experiences of children and young people who are in the care of local authorities and the challenges facing the adults and professionals who care for them. The cast featured young people from across Bristol, including a number of performers with experiences of care. Professional actors and musicians also took part. The theatre company aimed to raise the public profile of the White Paper *Care Matters: Time for Change* (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). By including a number of children and young people living within the care system, the company delivered one of its key aims by providing opportunities to develop young people's talents and skills and support their emotional well-being. Staff at the University of the West of England, Bristol undertook an evaluation of this work between August and December 2007. The evaluation was commissioned by the Government Office for the South West.

What did we do?

Consistent with the project aims this evaluation intended to assess the impact of involvement in *City of One* - a theatre and music performance depicting the life and experiences of a young person living within the care system in Bristol. The objectives of the evaluation were:

- To understand the experiences of the children and young people participating in the project, identifying the development of key skills and the impact on health and well-being.
- To identify the strengths and weaknesses of the project from the perspective of young people's carers and the professionals involved.

The evaluation methods used included observation of the cast during rehearsals and performances, and pre- and post-performance interviews with 10 young people with experience of care. A 14 item questionnaire (The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale, NHS Health Scotland et al., 2006) was also administered to all participants at the end of each interview. During observations attention was paid to the level,

types and quality of young people's participation, including the quality of the interactions between the actors and participants, mechanisms of support for successful engagement and observed outcomes for young people. Initial interviews aimed to ascertain participants' fears, expectations and feelings about involvement. Follow-up interviews focused on reflections on involvement, including feelings associated with any changes in confidence and/or skills associated with the project, perceptions of well-being (NHS Health Scotland et al., 2006) and views about the role of arts in young people's lives.

Interview data were also collected from both foster and residential carers (n=5) and theatre company staff involved in managing the production (n=2). Carer interviews focused on the impact of drama and arts on young people particularly in relation to confidence and well-being. Theatre company interviews focused on the mechanisms necessary to support young people's involvement and the practical, social and artistic challenges that faced the theatre company during the rehearsal and performance periods. Interviewees also reflected on lessons learnt for the future.

What did we find?

General perceptions of *City of One*

- Overall the young people who took part in this evaluation were extremely positive about the project. They found it fun and exciting and several spoke about the 'buzz' they experienced when performing in front of a paying audience. The experience as a whole demonstrated that learning could be enjoyable and that children and young people in care could be successful performers.
- The project was successful in that it was able to attract a number of young people who had not previously taken part in any professional theatre productions. It was also able to consolidate and develop the skills and abilities of those young people with some prior theatre experience.

Impact on young people of taking part

- Impacts associated with involvement in *City of One* included the development of performance, communication and team working skills. Young people and carers commented on how through involvement in the performance young people had developed

a heightened awareness of themselves and how this had impacted on their abilities to co-operate and be tolerant of others.

- Friendships and social connectedness were key impacts of the project. Respondents talked about how young people who were previously resistant to taking risks in new situations or found it difficult to make friends felt a strong sense of engagement and friendship with other cast members during the project.
- All those interviewed spoke about the gains in confidence associated with being involved in a high quality professional performance. A strong sense of pride was felt by both performers and carers. Those involved had become increasingly enthusiastic, motivated and aspirational in terms of their continued involvement in arts based projects and courses.

Learning about experiences of care

- The performance itself was seen as an important opportunity for young people to communicate experiences of the care system to large audiences, including influential adults and their peers.
- Those involved talked about how they identified with the characters and that the performance had allowed them to understand how their behaviour may have impacted on others, particularly foster carers and their families.
- Carers on the other hand highlighted how involvement had acted as a vehicle for discussion and had helped to move the young people on emotionally in relation to coming to terms with their care experiences.

Factors affecting involvement

- There were a significant number of factors identified that had both a negative and positive impact on young cast members' capacity to stay involved during the performance period. Positive factors included encouragement and support from carers, financial support for travel, childcare and sometimes lunches. Appropriate levels of skilled adult support encouraged participation, teamwork and focus, and where necessary helped to mediate disputes between cast members. Negative factors included inconsistent support from carers, particularly in residential units where workers changed regularly, and factors away from the production, such as the home environment

and/or school, college or other commitments. These latter commitments made it difficult for some of the young people to maintain their involvement in the intensive rehearsal and performance schedule.

- The theatre company's capacity to produce an alternative shorter piece of theatre; *City of Ten*, meant that those young people who found it difficult to commit to the intensive requirements of the main performance were able to remain involved in, and therefore enthusiastic about, the project as a whole.

What we recommend

For local authorities

- Local authorities in collaboration with others should actively seek to develop performing arts and creative opportunities for children and young people in their care. The provision of additional financial support for youth based arts projects is crucial to meet the needs of children in care and support their successful engagement. As demonstrated in this project, additional resources may also be needed to support young people who are not able to maintain their involvement at the level required.
- The Healthy Care Programme was cited in *Care Matters: Time for Change* (Department for Education and Skills, 2007) as providing a strategic partnership framework for building sustainable activity to promote the health and well being of 'looked after' children, involving creative arts. However, lack of available good quality evidence to underpin the impact of arts based work can make it difficult for projects to secure funding to extend their work and the associated benefits. It is therefore important, that when possible the local authority raises the profile of projects and their impacts through evaluation reports such as this to a wide range of audiences.
- Learning from this project could be further disseminated to other Local Authorities Children and Young People's Services, Primary Care Trusts and the voluntary sectors through a range of mediums including networks, newsletters, academic and professional orientated conferences and publications.
- Carers including those from social work, residential care and foster care need explicit information and training about the benefits of arts based involvement for children and young people. This needs to include practical advice

about how to prepare and support young people in their involvement. Where appropriate, trained carers and professionals also need to consider the possibility of initiating life story work.

For policy makers

- Arts Council England and the Children's Workforce Development Council should consider the opportunities for well being and development offered to children in care through their involvement in arts based projects. This raises implications for the selection and training of artists who are working with vulnerable children and young people, including those in care.
- Provision of performing arts opportunities for vulnerable young people should form part of a cross governmental strategy to promote well being using the arts. High profile 'one off' projects such as *City of One* should be viewed as part of the strategy that Local Authorities promote as corporate parents alongside smaller-scale community-based arts opportunities.

For arts organisations

- The specific and collective needs of young people in care and the implications for support, needs detailed assessment during the planning phase of the project. This may have implications for the balance of the cast between those needing additional support and those young people who are emotionally able to give support to their fellow cast members.
- Where possible projects should be collaborations between the statutory, voluntary and arts sectors to support the successful participation of young people in creative arts projects. Building on work undertaken through the Arts Council and National Children's Bureau (NCB) around arts partnerships and networks, it is essential that good practice is shared locally, regionally and nationally.
- It is essential that companies/projects consider issues of sustainability. If young people are motivated to take part they need clear opportunities to further improve their skills and move on their performance aspirations at the end of projects or performances.
- There is a significant amount of mentoring and high level of emotional demand placed on

those individuals managing projects that involve vulnerable young people. It is therefore important that projects identify the opportunity for those taking a leadership role to access peer based supervision for support, critical reflection and professional development.

For theatre companies

- Clear project objectives need to be agreed at the outset. Young people appreciate and are motivated by being part of performances that are of high quality and are primarily interested in the drama/performance element. Sharing care experiences may be an outcome but should not be a requirement.
- Recruitment of a young cast should include mechanisms that actively seek out and encourage young people with experiences of care to take part. However, young people like to feel that they are recruited on their own artistic merit as part of the cast or production team, and not solely because they are children and young people in care. In addition, consideration needs to be given to ensure that young people in care are not identifiable from publicity materials without gaining prior consent.
- Prior to recruitment of a young cast, realistic consideration needs to be given to the capacity of the company or project to meet the needs of the young people involved, in particular those cast members with additional needs, such as children and young people who are disabled or in care. All members of the production team need to be appropriately trained and able to respond effectively using strategies that support young people's involvement in the project.
- Timing of rehearsals needs to be carefully considered when there are significant numbers of performances to ensure that young people's other commitments can be equally well managed.

For researchers in the field

- There is increasing pressure on policy makers and practitioners in arts based initiatives to provide evidence on the effectiveness of interventions such as *City of One*. Key to this process is the funding of comprehensive mixed methods evaluations that can establish the ingredients necessary to ensure the successful participation of young people in care. In addition researchers should establish not only

the immediate but also the longer term outcomes for children and young people and how participation in the arts is sustained over time.

- The successful piloting of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (NHS Health Scotland et al., 2006) highlights that this could be an accessible and effective scale in assessing changes in perceptions of well-being in larger populations of children and young people in care. Should the opportunity arise we would recommend further exploration of this tool.
- Further evaluation methods need to be explored to ensure that those young people and carers who do not give consent to be interviewed can be involved in project evaluations in other ways.

Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Introduction

City of One is a play with music which was researched, commissioned and given a professional production by Myrtle Theatre Company at the Tobacco Factory Theatre, Bristol in September 2007. The piece was written by Mike Akers with original music by Benji Bower, directed by Heather Williams, Artistic Director of Myrtle Theatre Company, co-directed by David Straun and managed by Hilary Davis, Administrative Director of Myrtle Theatre Company. The play explores the experiences of the children who are in the care of local authorities and the challenges facing the adults and professionals who care for them. Crucially the company wished to raise the profile of the *Care Matters: Time for Change* White Paper (Department for Education and Skills (DFES), 2007), and by including a number of children and young people living within the care system, help to deliver one of its key aims by providing opportunities to develop young people's talents and skills and support their emotional well-being. Staff at the University of the West of England, Bristol undertook an evaluation of this work between August and December 2007. The evaluation was commissioned by the Government Office for the South West.

1.2 The evaluation

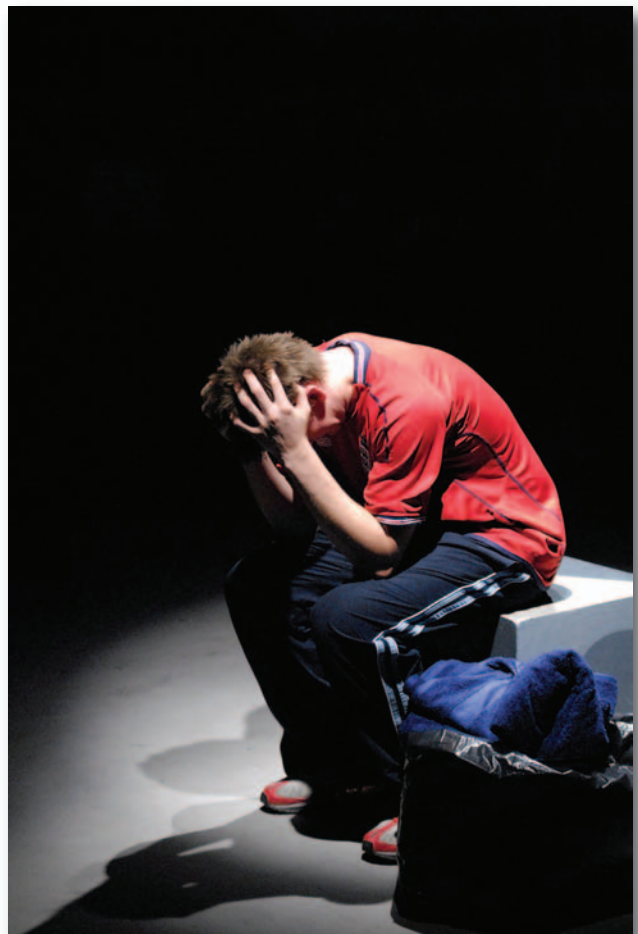
The purpose of the evaluation is to inform future practice and help build a body of evaluation for the region that analyses the impact of high quality arts provision for children and young people in care. Consistent with the project aims this evaluation aimed to assess the impact of involvement in *City of One* - a theatre and music performance depicting the life and experiences of a young person living within the care system in Bristol. The objectives of the evaluation were:

- To understand the experiences of the children and young people participating in the project, identifying the development of key skills and the impact on health and well-being.
- To identify the strengths and weaknesses of the project from the perspective of young people's carers and the professionals involved.

1.3 Content of the report

This report presents the findings of the fieldwork conducted with the young people, carers and

theatre company professionals involved in the project. Chapter Two outlines the national policy context of the evaluation and gives details of the project's development and structure. The methods used to carry out the evaluation are described in Chapter Three. Chapter Four focuses on the delivery of the rehearsals and performances, capturing the views of the young people together with observational data collected by the research team. Chapter Five explores the views of the theatre directors and the young people's carers. Chapter Six provides details of what has happened since the performances and Chapter Seven includes a discussion of the findings along with conclusions and recommendations.



Chapter Two Research context for young people, performing arts and 'living in care'

2.1 National Policy Context

Promoting the health and well-being of children and young people is a central feature of government policy (Department of Health (DH), Home Office, Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 1999; DH, 2000, 2002, 2004; Home Office, 1999; Department for Education and Employment, 1999; HM Treasury, 2003; DfES, 2004). *Every Child Matters* (HM Treasury, 2003) outlines the Government's aim to support children and young people to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being. This requires that key agencies work collaboratively to provide well coordinated, joined up services in order to respond effectively to a diverse range of needs. Although the five outcomes identified above apply to all children and young people, a commitment to narrowing the inequalities gap means that initiatives targeting particular groups, including children in care, is high on the Government agenda.

Within the recently published white paper *Care Matters: Time for Change* (DfES, 2007) there is fundamental recognition of a number of poor educational and health outcomes associated with living within the care system. These include poor educational attainment; high levels of mental ill-health; poor general health and difficulties

accessing services. Recognition is also made within the *Every Child Matters* (HM Treasury, 2003) outcomes framework of the significance of emotional and social well being and the role play and leisure activities in providing opportunities for children and young people. This relates to the achievement of the five key outcomes: being healthy; staying safe; enjoyment and achievement, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well being. The Act requires local authorities to provide young people with sufficient opportunities to take part in leisure and creative art activities, and states the need to consult with children and young people to find out what they would like and any barriers they face. These duties are further emphasised within the National Healthy Care Standard (DfES, 2005) that states that a child or young person living in a healthy care environment will 'have opportunities to develop personal and social skills, talents and abilities and to spend time in freely chosen play, cultural and leisure activities' (National Children's Bureau (NCB), 2004, p5).

2.2 Arts, health, young people and the policy context

The recent increasing investment in arts programmes for young people generally is based on a growing belief that young people's engagement with the arts, irrespective of setting, can help even the most vulnerable young people to develop skills (Arts Council England (ACE), 2003a; Lloyd & Lyth 2003). Arts Council England claims that participation in arts activities can have a transformative impact upon the lives of young people (ACE 2003a; 2003b). Much of this work has focused on encouraging young people to resist drugs (Starkey & Orme, 2001; Drugs Strategy Directorate, 2002). Findings from the national evaluation 'Positive Futures' (Positive Futures, 2005) revealed that young people reported that their engagement with the performing arts also impacted on therapeutic outcomes associated with relieving stress, calming down, dealing with criticism and managing their own emotions. Harland et al. (2000) report that young people's participation in



curriculum arts based subjects generates a sense of excitement, fulfilment and fun. Arts subjects attract student interest because of the personal and self-fulfilment needs they address, which are not necessarily met in the formal curriculum. This is particularly the case for girls who, in school settings, are more likely than boys to participate in drama and related arts activities (Miller & Budd 1999; Colley & Comber 2003).

Wider impacts of arts based activities include the integrative effect of out-of-school activities for the whole school community (Wilkin et al., 2003). Arts are also seen as offering a cost-effective opportunity to promote government policies with regard to social exclusion and life-long learning (Jackson, 2003). Theatre in Education (TIE) programmes have been discussed in connection with a wide variety of issues including sexual health (Denman et al., 1995), appropriate physical contact (Orme & Salmon, 2002; Orme et al., 2007) and homelessness (Day, 2002). Process and impact evaluations of drug education related TIE programmes report positive short-term effects upon student attitudes and, to a lesser extent, knowledge. However a review by Allott et al., (1999) found little evaluation evidence in terms of outcome effects and also identified difficulties integrating TIE activities into the mainstream curriculum.

2.3 Difficulties with evaluation and findings from a systematic review

However, although these claims are made about the impact of arts based interventions, most programmes that seek health promotion outcomes, including improvements in well being, have not been subject to robust evaluation (Orme and Salmon, 2002). In a recent systematic review assessing the impact of participation in performing arts on adolescent health and behaviour, Daykin et al., (2007) highlight a range of weaknesses associated with research in this field. This included, lack of comparability between studies, failures to specify health promotion aims within programmes or to explicitly theorise the association between creative artistic endeavours and health promotion outcomes. Nevertheless, process evaluations can provide accounts of how programme leaders conceptualise this relationship. There is some evidence (Health Development Agency, 2000) to indicate that the implementers of such programmes resist crudely causal accounts of the relationship between creative action and health outcomes.

Within the systematic review Daykin et al., (2007) studied literature published between 1994 and 2004 on the effects of performing arts for health in young people between 11 and 18 years of age. It included research on music, performance, drama and dance in community settings as well as non-curricular activity in mainstream education (Daykin et al., 2007). Of the 17 electronic databases searched, 3670 papers were identified, 14 of which were selected for inclusion in the review (see Daykin et al., 2007, for full discussion of the methodology). The findings highlighted the strongest evidence was related to drama interventions which had a positive impact on peer interactions and social skills, including young people defined at risk (McArdle, 2002). Qualitative research in the field supported this suggesting that involvement in performing arts develops confidence, social skills and supports peer relationships including team working and co-operation (Douglas, 2000; Lasic & Kennedy, 2002). However, the review highlights that research in the field is relatively early on in its development and in some cases methodologically inadequate. Consequently it has some way to go before claims can be made that it is sufficiently robust to underpin an evidence base within the field.

2.4 National projects

The Healthy Care Programme (DfES, 2005) has been established to support professionals from a range of agencies to form Healthy Care Partnerships with the object of promoting the health and well-being of children and young people in care. As part of this programme a recent publication 'Arts in Partnerships to Promote Health' highlights a range of creative work currently taking place that helps to build strong partnerships, train carers and staff and encourage participation with children and young people (NCB, 2006). Drawing on a number of case studies from all around the UK the briefing describes how creative techniques can be used to communicate to diverse audiences about care experiences and how these impact on health and well being.

Examples include Theatre in Education projects aimed at improving sexual health for vulnerable groups of young people; the development of training DVD's for professionals developed by young people exploring the experiences and the key issues facing young people both 'in and leaving care'; additional work with professionals has included the use of live drama and follow up

workshops to explore multi-agency working with vulnerable young people; while other projects have focused on raising the self esteem, well being and aspirations of young people through live performance, supported by professional actors, or exploring feelings and trauma through psycho-drama techniques. For a detailed account of these and other arts based projects visit www.ncb.org.uk.

2.5 The aim of this project

The aim of commissioning and producing this original play with music was to explore the experiences of children who are in the care of local authorities, usually described as children and young people in care, and related themes such as social exclusion. This arose from Myrtle Theatre Company's work directly with children and young people in care, foster carers, social workers, health professionals and education specialists. In their most recent work they used drama to consult with young people on behalf of the NCB and DfES' work on Healthy Care (DfES, 2005). Similarly, Myrtle worked with regional government officers, supported by Healthy Care Programme Lead, Helen Chambers, to consult with young people on the development of the Green Paper, *Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care* (DfES, 2006). The project developed from the Company's desire to raise the profile of the *Care Matters: Time for Change* White Paper (DfES, 2007). By including a number of children and young people living within the care system, the project delivers on one of the White Paper's key aims by providing opportunities to develop young people's talents and skills and support their emotional well-being.

2.6 Overview of the development of *City of One*

City of One was produced as a full-length production, including a four-week research and development period and a two-week rehearsal period. This culminated in September 2007 with a one and a half week playing period (5 - 15 September 2007) at the Tobacco Factory Theatre Bristol; a professional producing/receiving theatre. Myrtle Theatre Company recruited young people through a number of contacts and methods. This included getting in touch with young people previously involved in Myrtle productions; contacting local schools; advertising through Bristol Children and Young People's Services and community settings throughout the

City. The cast featured young people from across Bristol and a number of professional actors and musicians also took part. The young people in care were approached and given taster sessions in theatre skills. They were then selected from their performance during the sessions rather than being required to audition. This was in an attempt to avoid the intimidating traditional audition process which could potentially exclude vulnerable young people. Once selected each young person in care, together with their foster carer or key worker, were invited to an individual meeting with the Company to fully explain the project and their involvement.

The rehearsals took place over an intensive two-week period. For the majority of the rehearsals (daily from 10am to 4pm), all of the young performers (approx 25) were required to attend. During the first week a further five young performers attended singing rehearsals in the afternoon, one of those staying on in to the evening for script rehearsals. During the following week those five young performers attended daily from 10am to 4pm. In addition three young people attended from 10am to 4pm as part of the technical team.

2.6.1 Activities - Week 1

During week one the Company read through all of the play with the adult performers and took part in daily actors warm up exercises. These aimed to improve concentration, team building, and trust within the group and also included physical and vocal warm up exercises. Discussion groups also took place encouraging young people to analyse the meaning of the play and explore the characters including exercises that allowed young people to create their own characters. Young people were also in discussion with the designer about their costumes and fittings. All of the performers took part in daily dance rehearsals where the young people worked with the choreographer to help create the dances for the show, learning and perfecting the routines. In addition there were singing rehearsals where the young people learnt the songs for the show with the Musical Director, helping create the harmonies.

During the evenings the young performers learnt their lines at home and during the rehearsals helped create the scenes, improvising the action physically, learning to speak chorally and acting as an ensemble. Once the scenes were devised, rehearsals allowed for repetition that encouraged young people to learn their parts by heart. Those

young people involved in the technical aspects were required to shop for props, construct and paint scenery, make costumes and rig lighting.

2.6.2 Activities - Week 2

During Week two the young performers were joined by the adult actors and those scenes that involved both groups were rehearsed. Towards the end of the week the play was put together in sequential order and finally "run" as a complete play on the last Saturday.

2.7 Support strategies for young people's participation

The young performers were supported by a significant number of adults during the processes described previously. The Theatre Company's Administrative Director undertook responsibility for organising the care and chaperoning of young people during their involvement. Her responsibilities were wide ranging and focused on young people's participation. Activities included registering young people, following them up if they didn't arrive, providing support for transport costs and lunch when appropriate, assisting disabled performers, and generally dealing with problems as they arose. Importantly this role included a significant amount of counselling and supporting of young people if they became upset anxious or frustrated. In addition there were four other support workers responsible for young people in rehearsals, facilitating their learning and engagement. One staff member was funded through the theatre company, another was a volunteer and two were staff from a local authority organisation.

2.8 Creative support and development

It was the Artistic Director who took overall responsibility for the creative engagement of young people, supporting them through the rehearsal process. The Administrative Director was mainly responsible for adult direction but also supported young people in the rehearsal process. In total 23 professional adults were involved in the production of *City of One* including a stage management team - responsible for teaching and supporting young technicians in their work but also present in rehearsal; a designer and wardrobe supervisor - also responsible for the young technicians and supporting the young people with their costumes; professional actors - mainly responsible for their own creative input but working closely with the young people, supporting them in the process; a

musical director and choreographer - creatively supporting the young people through the process. In addition the cast included some older young performers not in care who took on an informal responsibility to support the younger members and help teach them their lines and dance routines.

Chapter Three Research Methods

3.1 The aim of the evaluation

Consistent with the project aims this evaluation aimed to assess the impact of involvement in the *City of One* - a theatre and music performance depicting the life and experiences of a young person living within the care system in Bristol. The objectives of the evaluation were:

- To understand the experiences of the children and young people participating in the project, identifying the development of key skills and the impact on health and well-being.
- To identify the strengths and weaknesses of the project from the perspective of young people' carers and the professionals involved.

The purpose of the evaluation is to inform future practise and help build a body of evaluation for the region that analyses the impact of high quality arts provision for children and young people 'in care'.

The data was collected between September and

October 2007 in three phases. The initial phase involved semi-structured interviews and completion of a well-being survey prior to young people's involvement in the production. The focus of these interviews was to understand the initial expectations and motivations of young people to join the cast and production. During the second phase of the evaluation observations were carried out throughout the rehearsal period to establish the level and quality of young people's engagement. Phase three involved follow up semi-structured interviews with young cast and production members, interviews with foster and residential carers and members of the Myrtle Theatre Company. In addition, cast members completed a follow up well-being survey. The foci of this period of data collection were reflections on young people's experiences of involvement, the factors that had supported it and any identifiable impacts.

3.2 Sampling

There were two casts and a total of thirty five young people taking part in the production and performance of *City of One*. Of these, fourteen had experience of the care system; three were in the process of leaving care and 11 were young people 'in care' living either in foster (n=9) or residential placements (n=2). Seven were male and six were female, all aged between 11 and 19 years.

All fourteen cast members were approached on behalf of UWE by the theatre company and asked to take part in the evaluation. This was believed to be the least threatening way to approach the young people and gave them the opportunity to decline without having to do so directly to the UWE researchers. Young people were made aware that their involvement in the evaluation was voluntary, that they had the right to withdraw at any time and that refusal would not impact on their involvement in the production. 10 young production and cast members with care experience agreed to take part in the evaluation, agreement was also sought from their foster or residential carers.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Initial semi-structured interviews with young cast and production members prior to involvement

Initial interviews were conducted with 10 young cast and production members, all with experience of the care system. The interviews took place



face-to-face at the Tobacco Factory Theatre and were conducted by two research staff from UWE, Bristol. It was important to establish an on going rapport with participants; consequently wherever possible, the same researcher completed both the pre- and post- performance interview (see below). All of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in full. Initial interviews aimed to ascertain participants' fears, expectations and feelings about involvement in the musical drama production and performance. Although young people were not asked specifically to share their experiences of care, this did sometimes happen as part of the interview process. Additional biographical data collected throughout the interviews is therefore included within the evaluation to describe the breadth and intensity of young peoples care experiences. This takes account of the types of challenges young people have faced to date particularly around issues of participation and exclusion. Young people were also asked their views about any previous experiences of arts interventions. At the end of the interview, young people were given a small gift token of £5 as recognition and thanks for their involvement.

3.3.2 The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale

Given a key aspect of the project was focusing on the support and development of well-being, young people were also asked to reflect on the domains of well-being set out in the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (NHS Health Scotland et al., 2006). Unlike many previous mental health scales that focus on morbidity, this scale was used because it focuses on positive mental health. It also allows for exploration of contextual constructs associated with the individual, community and the structural factors which act as determinants and/or risk or protective factors in mental health. The 14 item questionnaire was administered to all participants either at the beginning/end of the qualitative interview and was completed by the researcher, or in some cases by the young person. By integrating completion of the questionnaire into the interview it was possible for the researchers to support completion of the scale, irrespective of whether or not participants had difficulties with literacy. Participant's responses were used to contextualise young people's experiences of involvement. Due to the small numbers of young people included in the study, it was not possible to undertake any statistical analysis of the changes in perceptions of well-being held by

participants during their involvement. However, the questions were pertinent in that they helped young people to consider to what extent the experience had impacted on their well-being.

3.3.3 Observation

Observation of three drama rehearsals and two performances took place using standardised observation criteria. Particular attention was paid to the level, types and quality of young people's participation. It included the quality of the interactions between the actors and participants, mechanisms of support for successful engagement, and observed outcomes for young people. The researchers took written notes both during and immediately after each observation. Where both researchers took part in the observation, we then worked together to compile a single set of written notes.

3.3.4 Follow-up semi-structured interviews with young cast and production members

Nine follow-up interviews were conducted two to three weeks after the performances had finished. The interviews took place at the Tobacco Factory or at participant's homes. One follow-up interview was conducted over the telephone as the young person was unable to spare the time to meet face-to-face. Unfortunately it was not possible to carry out a follow-up interview with one young person (YP5) who dropped out of the project during rehearsals. All of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in full. Follow-up interviews focused on reflections on involvement, including feelings associated with any changes in confidence and/or skills (negatively or positively) associated with the project, perceptions of well-being (NHS Health Scotland et al., 2006) and views about the role of arts in young people's lives. As indicated above, the 14 item Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale was administered again either at the beginning or end of each follow-up interview.

3.3.5 Follow-up interviews with Carers and members of the Theatre Company

Additional interviews were carried out with five carers; four foster carers and one residential worker, to establish their perceptions of the benefits of the young people's involvement in the drama project. Three interviews were carried out face-to-face and two over the telephone as the most convenient for respondents. All of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in full. Questions focused on the impact of drama

and arts on young people in particular in relation to confidence and well-being. Interviews were also conducted with the Theatre Company's Artistic and Administrative Directors in the weeks following the final performances. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the Tobacco Factory by one researcher and were audio recorded and transcribed in full. Questions focused on the mechanisms necessary to support young people's involvement and the practical, social and artistic challenges that faced the theatre company during the rehearsal and performance periods. Interviewees also reflected on lessons learnt for the future.

3.4 Data analysis

During data analysis, interview transcripts were analysed for data categories, themes and sub-themes. Interview transcripts were analysed using the recognised qualitative data analysis approach of sorting quotations from the transcripts into data units or categories, themes and sub-themes. This was done using the more traditional 'cut and paste' approach whereby the researcher reads and re-reads the transcripts drawing out themes. Data generated from the questionnaires completed by the young people was analysed using descriptive statistics.

A key aspect of good systematic qualitative research is credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by which they mean that respondent's experience is accurately interpreted. Silverman (2000) suggests it is important therefore to adhere to a form of validity that does justice to and is respectful of the respondents experience and contribution. Respondent validation (Silverman, 1993), whereby interview scripts and/or aspects of the analysis are returned to study respondents to be verified, modified, or rejected is one technique often used by researchers. This would not have been practical or appropriate in the given timescale of the project and the literacy abilities of the young people taking part. However, in line with NCB Guidelines for Research (NCB, 2003), young people involved in the evaluation process were valued for the perspectives they contributed to the evaluation and creative processes. The final product was delivered across 12 performances in September 2007 at the Tobacco Factory in Bristol. In total 1642 people attended the performances.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Research participants were invited to participate in the research by the Myrtle Theatre Company

and a follow up letter from UWE, Bristol. Immediately preceding the interview participants were asked to read and sign a consent form, acknowledging their agreement to the audio-taping of the interview and inclusion of data in the subsequent publication of the evaluation.

In addition to the consent form, an information sheet provided a summary of the aims and rationale of the research. Participants were also informed that they may finish the interview at any stage. Wherever possible, carers were informed about their child's involvement in the evaluation. This evaluation did not involve research methods or techniques that can harm participants. Researchers were fully briefed in interview and data collection methods and in the conduct required of them as researchers. Research adhered to the NCB statement of Values and Principles, the NCB Equal opportunity policy statement, NCB Child Protection Policy and in accordance with the British Sociological Association's Code of Professional Conduct and Statement of Ethical Practice and the British Psychological Society Code of Conduct.

Myrtle Theatre Company is committed to involving both young people and their care workers. Any problems identified by the researchers during the interviews were referred to the staff within the Theatre Company to undertake appropriate action. A copy of the final report will be made available for research participants via the Theatre Company. In addition a short summary will be sent Via the Theatre Company to their homes. The guidance cited in the British Educational Research Association cited in the Revised Ethical Guidelines For Educational Research (2004) was addressed throughout the research process, including: informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity. Approval was also obtained from the UWE, Bristol Research Ethics Committee. Particular attention was paid to issues of child protection and both researchers involved were required to provide a current copy of an Enhanced Criminal Record Certificate issued by the Criminal Records Bureau.

Chapter Four Findings from young people

4.1 Observational data

Three drama rehearsals and two performances were observed by one or two researchers using standardised observation criteria (see appendix 1). The researcher/s took written notes during and immediately after each observation. These notes formed the basis of this summary. Further details about the observations are provided in Table 1.

4.1.1 Structure of the rehearsals

The rehearsals often involved a mixture of whole group and small group activities. Warm-ups and briefings often involved the whole group, however in order to practice specific scenes it was necessary to split up into smaller groups comprising, for example, the singers or the two different casts (Towers and Bridges). The different groups came together in order to practice complete scenes and those cast members who were not actively involved in a particular scene were asked to sit and watch.

4.1.2 Content of the rehearsals

Observation 1 involved the young people thinking about the play and the different characters in it, particularly Liam, the young person living in care. It also involved practising dance moves/singing, as appropriate, and starting to learn their lines.

Observation 2 involved practicing a number of complete scenes. It also included an in-depth session on practicing their lines, with particular emphasis on getting into character and putting emotion into their performances. Another session focussed on practicing dance moves, with particular reference to 'prompt' lines.

Observation 3 involved a briefing on the performances so far, including feedback from members of the audience. The group then worked through a series of points

Table 1 Observations

Observation	Rehearsal/ Performance	Day	Time	Researchers
1	Rehearsal	Day 2	13.40-16.00	DS, CR
2	Rehearsal	Day 8	10.00-12.30	CR
3	Pre-show rehearsal	Day 16	18.00-19.00	CR
4	Performance	Day 16	19.30-21.00	DS, CR
5	Performance	Day 18	19.30-21.00	DS

which the artistic director had put together after the previous evenings performance. These involved reminding people what to do/how to act at certain points in the play. The group then took part in a warm-up activity before practicing a number of scenes.

4.1.3 Practitioner input

The sessions were led by theatre professionals with experience/skills relevant to the content of each particular session. Whole group briefings tended to be led by the artistic director. Adult helpers were also in attendance.

Overall the session leaders were very enthusiastic and energetic. They had a clear focus and communicated this well, which helped to keep the young people on task. They appeared to have good relationships with the young people and were quick to offer praise and encouragement. In



spite of the range of ages involved, the session leaders managed to pitch the activities at what appeared to be an appropriate level.

When the professional actors and singers were involved in the rehearsals, they too appeared to get on well with the young people and were often seen chatting and sharing jokes. As might be expected, those closest in age to the young people tended to interact with them the most, particularly the young man who played the part of Liam.

During observation 1, some adult helpers appeared to be unsure of what their role was, and tended to just sit and watch or wander between the different sessions. On occasion, however, they actively tried to involve young people in group activities and also went to find those who wandered in and out of the sessions. This role was more apparent in the later observations.

4.1.4 Engagement by young people

Most of the young people stayed engaged and enthusiastic throughout the rehearsals, even when they weren't actively involved in a particular scene/activity. There was, however, a group of younger male cast members who appeared to find it difficult to stay on task and they often needed a lot of input/encouragement from the session leaders in order to stay involved. This was particularly obvious as lunch or home time approached and could have been because they were tired or hungry or just wanted to go home. Two of these younger males (one with experience of the care system) subsequently withdrew from the production. During the rehearsals some of the young people wandered in and out of the sessions. It was not clear why this was and sometimes caused delays while the adult helpers had to go and find them.

During the pre-show rehearsal (observation 3), the young people seemed a bit over-excited and although they were listening to what the theatre director was telling them, they also messed around and chatted amongst themselves. Perhaps they felt that by this stage of the project (the second week of performances) they knew what they were doing and therefore didn't feel the need to listen so intently. They were also clearly keen to get into costume and get on with the performance.

During the performances (observations 4 and 5) all of the young people put a great deal of effort into their individual performances. On occasion

some of the younger cast members could be seen to be looking around the audience rather than remaining focused on the play. However, this didn't detract from the performance and only occurred when they weren't actively involved in a particular scene.

4.1.5 Impact on young people

Throughout the rehearsals the young people put a lot of energy into their performances and seemed to be enjoying themselves. Although some of the young people looked nervous during the first observation, and often needed encouragement in order to take part, by the second observation everyone looked confident and appeared to know their part/s fairly well. In fact the professionals often needed more prompting than the young people!

Although there appeared to be a number of small groups forming within the larger group during observation 1, by the time of observation 2, most of the young people appeared to be mixing well with one another. The young people looked like they were having fun together and there were several examples of the older children encouraging the younger children to take part/to stop misbehaving. Overall this seemed to be well received and helped to reduce the burden on the session leaders.

During observations 4 and 5, the cast gave an excellent performance with no obvious mistakes or slip-ups. The performance was very well received by the audience and the young people looked very happy with this reaction whilst taking their bow. All of the young people appeared confident in their roles and looked like they were enjoying themselves, however, some of the younger cast members were visibly tired by the end of the performance. Perhaps the late night performances followed by getting up early to go to school the next day was beginning to take its toll.

4.2 Initial pre-performance interviews

Interviews were conducted with 10 young cast and production members (four male, six female) with experience of the care system at the beginning of the rehearsal period. Questions aimed to explore participants' fears, expectations and feelings about involvement in the drama/musical production. An interview schedule is included in appendix 2.

4.2.1 Previous dance/drama/musical experience

Extent of previous experience

Most of the young people had some previous dance/drama/musical experience although this varied from quite limited, school-based experience to participating in/leading amateur dramatic groups:

I created a drama club for Year 7's when I was in Year 10 and that went on for a couple of months but then, obviously, I had my GCSE's coming up and so I had to stop doing it. But that's the only ... that's the closest I've done to drama. (YP1)

I did "Through the Wire" last September with the Myrtle Theatre Company ... I did alternate nights and one night I did the role of a prison officer and then the other night I did the role of a mother whose son was in prison ... it was pretty cool. (YP2)

... I've been part of an amateur dramatic group since I was 13. I now run it ... (YP3)

I did my school play, which was two years ago ... And in school we do drama ... (YP4)

How did it go?

All of the young people seemed to have enjoyed their previous experiences. One young male commented that his enjoyment of his previous backstage role had led to him taking the same role in this performance:

It was backstage. [I: ... And did you enjoy that?] Yes. That's why I'm back again. (YP4)

Another two were equally positive:

I love it, yes. (YP3)

It's been really good. I just enjoy being on stage. After all the hard work's put out of the way it's all just enjoyable. (YP10)

Two young people spoke about feeling nervous before their previous performances, but both felt that these worries had disappeared once they were actually on stage:

... it was one of my first big, major productions ... I've done things before with people like acting in small group performances but this one was in front of a huge audience ... it was ... like ... "Oh, my God ... am I going to do this? Am I going to do this right? Am I going to do this wrong?" ... But, thankfully, it went really well. (YP2)

I felt really, really nervous and I don't quite know how to put it ... but once I got in there all my nerves just went ... when I got up on stage. (YP5)

What did they gain from their previous experience?

Three of the young people felt that they had become more confident as a result of their previous drama experiences:

... confidence ... massive, massive amounts of confidence ... not just to act ... just to talk to people and to interact with people and to dance as well and sing. I've been singing for 11 years, since I was about eight, so I'm quite used to singing in front of people ... but not like that ... that's a big thing for me. So loads of confidence ... (YP2)

... it helps my confidence and things like that ... (YP3)

More confidence. (YP6)

Two spoke about meeting new people and developing friendships.

We were just like a massive family and when the play finished ... on the last night everybody was crying because they'd got so close in that short period of time that we just didn't want it to finish because we knew we were not going to see each other for a while. (YP2)

Two spoke about the enjoyment gained from taking part:

... the adrenalin rushes. The best think about performing is that ... when everyone claps ... you know, you go all, like, shivery. That's the best bit, that's when you know that you're doing your job well. (YP2)

... I just enjoy it ... (YP3)

Three felt that it had helped to improve their dancing, singing, acting or backstage skills.

... how to be a backstage manager, kind of thing. (YP4)

I've learned a lot more about acting ... about the emotional side. (YP6)

Perhaps one of the most striking stories was from a 16 year old young woman who believed it was her involvement in the arts that had stopped her both getting into and causing trouble. She suggested it:

... helped with my future I didn't really enjoy school, I just used to hang around and

cause trouble. I felt that everyone was against me and I was against everyone, I just would not let anyone in, then they wanted to exclude me. When they suggested I join the musical. It made me feel proud that I was actually doing something, I was special ... (YP7)

What did they find difficult/easy?

One young male explained that he had found it easy to get involved in his previous drama performance as he had actually initiated the play:

I was the one who came up with the idea ... Because I didn't like the fact that everyone ... had nothing to do apart from the school work and ... so I spoke to the head teacher about the play and he got involved in it. (YP5)

Two young people outlined difficulties they had experienced when taking part in a previous Myrtle Theatre Company performance. Although one explained that she had managed to resolve these issues with the support of the choreographer, theatre directors and other cast members, the other was unable to do this and therefore had to drop out:

... it took me a long time to get to grips with dancing. But the choreographer that we had ... she's absolutely amazing ... she took the time and she offered to help me out when no one was there ... just to teach me extra moves and she just had the patience of a saint, basically, and she would sit there and she'd say, "Don't worry about it. You're getting frustrated but you will get it." And I finally got it but I don't think I would have done it if I didn't have the support that [the choreographer] gave me because I'm petrified of dancing ... but I had great support from Heather and Hilary and all the cast and everything just saying ... like ... "Just keep going. You're not finding it easy but you've got your own little bits that you can ... sort of ... offer to help with other people, whereas other people are helping you with dancing." So it's sort of ... like ... even though it was hard and I didn't really like it, it became something that I really enjoyed doing and now I do it in college. So it's really sort of weird. (YP2)

... the last play that they did ... it was just like wet like, I was living the other side of town and it was getting back late at night

and I didn't want to do that and ... yes, just things like that and the stress from where I live didn't help either, and I couldn't really concentrate on it and things like that. [I: Is that the one that you ended up dropping out of?] Yes ... (YP3)

One young woman (YP7) described the practical difficulties of being a single parent. Arranging childcare and travel to get rehearsals took a lot of energy but she felt happy to make the effort as she enjoyed the experience so much and she wanted her daughter to be proud of her achievements. This young woman felt this was something she could do even though she was a single mum.

4.2.2 Involvement in *City of One*

How did they hear about it?

The young people heard about the performance in a variety of ways. Five young people received information about *City of One* as a result of their previous involvement with Myrtle, either through taking part in a previous performance or in an activity day/drama workshop:

Because I was in the last [performance] Heather and Hilary sent out letters to everybody who'd been in the last one just to say that there was another performance coming up but you have to audition for it. There's no ... you can't just do it. So I thought, "Oh, I might go and audition for it." (YP2)

I went to a day ... there was a day where they just gave acting activities and stuff and then they asked for me back because they thought I was quite good. (YP4)

I don't know how long ago it was but I saw a play here called "Jump" ... And then I signed up for the drama workshop ... then in June I got a letter to say that I was invited to do an audition for the play ... we didn't know what it was. I got picked and then I got all the information through about it. (YP6)

Two young people found out about the performance from flyers distributed by Myrtle:

I was sent a letter about it and I really wanted to do it because I've never done anything like this before and I thought I may as well give it a go ... and see how it goes ... it was like a flyer ... like it had all the information on, ring up a number and let them know that you want to do it. (YP1)

It was from my college. They were handing out leaflets and stuff ... (YP3)

Three others got involved when Myrtle got in touch with their schools:

They came to my school to do auditions, so Heather told me to be in, so I did. (YP6)

I think they got in touch with my school, the Myrtle Theatre Company, because there's a few people in my school that are in care as well. So I think they chose a few of us, and I was one of them and we came down here to have a look what it was about and everything and I came to an audition. (YP8)

Feelings about getting involved

One young woman (YP8) felt very uneasy about taking part, in fact she was not sure about doing it. The fact that she already knew another cast member from care helped her to feel more confident:

If you know someone that you can ... like ... probably talk to and get on with, have that connection ... And it gives you that extra bit of confidence with a group of people you don't know. So you've ... sort of ... got someone to have breaks with and chat with. (YP8 and YP9)

Another young woman explained that she was also feeling nervous about taking part. The fact that her sister was also involved in the project, made it a bit easier:

I am very, very nervous, extremely nervous ... I'm a bit scared about everyone watching me ... I met a few people when we came to the open day thing and, obviously, [my sister] but I don't really know anybody else who's doing it ... I feel a bit more at ease because [my sister's] with me and she knows some people that are doing it so ... it's all good. (YP1)

Feeling supported by the theatre company clearly helped one young woman to feel confident about her ability to achieve:

I love singing and acting, the company and director is such a great support to me it makes me want to do it. I come in here and do it for her. I am nervous, but I know I can pull through and do it. It is this theatre company that has made me know I can do it. The minute I walk through the door I don't think about anything else, I just focus on this. (YP7)

Another young woman explained that although she wasn't nervous now, she would be when it came to the actual performances:

You don't get nervous until you do it ... it's the lights ... my thing is it's not the people and it's not the set and it's not the people watching you ... it's the lights. As soon as those lights go on I know everybody's looking at me. I can have no lights on me, just be in this sort of setting and see everybody looking at me, and I'm fine with that because I've done it singing and I've done it with acting before, but as soon as those lights are on you, you start to sweat because of the heat ... and you know everybody's looking at you because you're the only thing that's lit. That's when you start to get scared. (YP2)

A young man explained that he was less nervous about taking part in *City of One* than he was when taking part in his school play:

... I was more nervous about the school one than I am about this ... I think it's one, because I'm older now and I'm grown up and two, it's because there's a lot more people to help me out if it goes wrong. (YP5)

Two young people explained that they were feeling positive about getting involved:

I'm feeling good about it. I am feeling good, yes. (YP5)

Good because everyone's like really nice and supportive even though ... under the circumstances of people's ... like ... backgrounds. (YP6)

Another young male explained that he was feeling positive about getting involved, even though he was the only young person in a team of adults:

It's really good ... And I'm the only boy on the team ... it's not a problem, it's good. (YP4)

Six young people said that they were feeling excited about taking part:

I can't wait ... its like ... "Hurry up, hurry up" cos it starts on Monday, which is like, yes ... I can't wait! But I just want to see the script, which I get today. (YP2)

Excited ... because I haven't really done a lot of backstage stuff so ... yes, I'm looking forward to seeing what that's like. (YP3)

Two young people were looking forward to working with the professional actors and singers. However, whereas one thought that this was likely to improve everyone's performances:

... they'll teach you how to do it and it's going to be an amazing experience and it's going to be a fantastic show because we've got this combination of professional actors and semi-professional actors and I think the professional actors are going to bring out a lot in the ones that aren't professional because they're going to be trying to ... not compete ... but trying to bring their performances up to a professional level so that they don't show that there's a big ... sort of ... difference between them ... (YP2)

the other was a bit worried that they might judge her:

... it's good to think that I'll be working with professionals, though. I'm just not really sure I like, you know, in case people judge me or something. That's the only thing I'm worried about, about people watching in case they might be judging. (YP1)

Some of the young people were asked whether they thought that two and a half weeks was enough time to get ready. Most responded positively:

There's enough time to do it all, yeah. (YP4)

I don't care how much time we've got as long as it's all done and we're confident that we're OK to do it, then that's all that I care about because I'm not fussed about the amount of time we've got. (YP5)

I could do it next week if I wanted. That's how well I know the play. (YP6)

Although one young woman who was working backstage commented:

I'm glad I'm not one of the actors! (YP3)

Another young woman explained that her experience of the care system meant that she was particularly keen to get involved in the performance:

... because it's such a strong subject for me I said to [the theatre directors] like, "Whatever you need just use me. Use me as much as you need to because the most important thing about this play is that we get it across and we get it right rather than it being some sort of fantasy, Tracey Beaker

style thing ... do you know what I mean ... It's got to be known what is going on and that it is true and this is what happens and this is how it happens and this is how people feel. They might be all happy and fine on the outside but they actually feel like crap on the inside. So that's ... my main thing is that everything gets across correctly ... (YP2)

She was also pleased that one of her parts would allow her to view the situation from a different perspective to that which she was used to:

I've got two characters ... which is great. One of the characters I'm absolutely chuffed to bits about because it's from a side of care that I haven't ever seen before. It's the daughter of the foster carers. So whereas I've always been the kid in foster care, now I get to see what it's like from the other side. Even though I'm acting it you can still act and be realistic and think it's real. If you think it's real it's more realistic ... (YP2)

Two other young people also felt that it was good idea to have a play on young people's experience of the care system:

I think it's good. I think it's good because I'm in a care unit at the moment and I found it very hard to leave my dad's to go into foster care and then I went to a care unit and I've been there for about 10 months ... so I've been away from my dad's for almost about 11 months ... not living there. It's very hard. [I: Yes ... And so ... Do you think it's a good thing that they're trying to do a play about being in care?] Yes, yes, yes. (YP5)

... people who don't really know about care ... they can know what's going on inside the kid's head and what they're thinking, so they're not just being that normal person that they think they are ... their background comes into it as well. (YP6)

Hopes and expectations

The young people identified a number of things they were hoping to get out of the performance. One spoke about gaining confidence, enjoying herself and identifying areas where she could improve:

A lot of confidence. Definitely confidence is the main thing and my skills in drama because obviously I haven't done it before. I've been to watch plays and stuff like that

and it just looked so amazing just ... like ... being on the stage and stuff ... So I just want to ... enjoy myself ... obviously this is the first time I've done it so I don't know what I'm good at and stuff like that so I'll see how this one goes and then I'll just learn from it and work on what I think needs working on. (YP1)

A young man also spoke about enjoying himself, despite the long hours involved:

I just enjoy myself thoroughly. It's quite amazing, actually. You're in ... like ... the rehearsals ... if you've ever done a production or something ... it's like you don't really know what to think in the rehearsals because they're so long ... I mean this is the same amount as school ... the same hours, basically ... it's still six hours a day. I have never worked so hard in my school plays ... and in the other one I only went once a week. (YP10)

A young woman spoke about gaining confidence and improving her performing skills in addition to enjoying the overall experience:

What I hope to get out of this is confidence, getting my skills, acting and singing, better. Just the experience of being here is enough ... being around it's like a thrill, like a journey. (YP7)

This young woman also focused on the development of team working skills, she recognised that sometimes she found it difficult to get along well with people but that this was an opportunity to learn how to co-operate more successfully.

Another young woman spoke about improving her acting skills, in particular by drawing on the knowledge and experience of the professional actors involved:

... just to broaden my ... sort of ... acting skills because I'm working with professional actors just to get as much out of them as I can, really, because who knows if I'm ever going to do that again. Who knows if I'm going to become a professional actor, but just while I can, just use them as much as I can. It sounds horrible but just to pull all their information out for myself and for other people ... (YP2)

Two young people who had backstage roles in the play thought that this was good experience for a possible future career:

... for me it's to try all the different aspects of it to see what I like and what I want to go into in the future ... [I've done] a lot of acting, but I haven't done that much back stage and costumes and sets and things. (YP3)

Hoping I can get better so I can go ... when I'm older probably try getting a job in backstage. (YP4)

Three young people were hoping it would lead to involvement in more productions in the future:

... hopefully to do more plays with the company who's doing this ... because I don't want to be doing just this one, because now that I'm here and now that I'm back into the performing arts I don't want to leave it. (YP5)

Maybe get spotted and get coverage ... Heather said to me that I've got an extraordinary talent and I could take it so far I can be an actor like on TV with the big, big stars. (YP6)

Just get me a few more opportunities in any more productions or something because I want to be an actor when I grow up. It's all I've really ever wanted to be apart from maybe a rock star. (YP10)

One young woman talked about how dancing offered an emotional release. This meant that she was able to express her feelings and frustrations in a constructive rather than destructive way:

I'm not ... a really good dancer ... but when I dance ... it is a release, I can get out all my frustration ... Instead of ... like ... my mum drinking like she does, I find a release through dancing, to get all my feelings out. It is like ice skating, I get an adrenalin rush just trying not to fall over and how fast I go and ... like you learn tricks and things like that, things you do with your feet, kind of thing. (YP9)

Although the focus of the question was on what the young people were hoping to gain from the performance, one young woman said that her main priority was for the audience to gain a greater understanding of what life in care is like and to get them to think in more depth about the content of the performance:

... mainly people to enjoy what they're watching. I don't want people to feel like, "Oh, this is really sad ... I didn't know they felt like this. "I want people to look at it

and think, "Oh this is really good," and I want them to leave the theatre and still be thinking about what they've watched and then ... to have people come up to us and ask us questions ... that would be a great achievement for me ... I just want people to realise how difficult it is, it's not a walk in the park for us. We've got it so hard and we cover up every emotion we've got because we've had to ... and that young people in care need as much support as they can, really, and there's more foster carers needed as well (laughs). So ... people just to understand the play, really ... I would rather people get that ... than me to get anything out of it for myself because it's such a big issue. (YP2)

This view was shared by two other young women (YP8 and YP9) who spoke about the potential gains to policy makers and professionals who might be watching the performances:

Yes, like the Government and then they might get an insight ... I reckon people can see better through actors ... because they can see what you're feeling. (YP9)

YP8 went on to explain how, from her perspective, policy makers and professionals do not always appreciate the difficulties facing families:

Because they will actually have different abilities with that. Like some parents can't cope because of their children's behaviour, anger and all that. They just need help. They don't necessarily need to be in care. But I chose to be in care because ... like ... me and my mum are too much alike and so I find it easier, I've found it a lot better since I've been in care. But ... like ... they're trying to get my little brother taken away, and he won't cope. He's lived with my mum all his life ... (YP8)

Staying involved

Most of the young people thought that they were likely to stay involved in the production. Four said that they usually did manage to stay involved in things they started:

I've never dropped out of anything to do with drama, never, just because ... I know if I drop out of it I can't go back to it. I wouldn't let myself go back to it because it's a sign of weakness. Nothing is too hard if it's what you want to do ... If I'm going to make a commitment I stick to it. If I've gone to audition and they've said, "We

want you to do this, this, this and this, "I'd sit there and think, "Oh, am I going to be able to do that? Is that going to be too much of a challenge," before I've committed to it, that's fine. But if I've committed to it and they've told me everything they expect me to do, I can't drop out. It's not fair. It's not fair on everyone. (YP2)

... I don't drop out, no. (YP4)

One young woman, however, commented that although she didn't usually manage to stay involved in things, she was determined to do so this time:

I haven't actually completed something for ... like I haven't stuck to it the whole time. I've wanted to do acting for ages. I've just never had the confidence to do it. So I am definitely going to stick at this one ... yeah, get through it ... make sure I do. (YP1)

A young man commented that although he thought it was going to be hard work, he thought he probably would be able to stay involved throughout the project:

Yesterday I doubted that for a bit because I just thought 'oh no. I've just realised something ... how hard it's going to be.' But I think I might be able to [stay involved]. (YP10)

The young people appeared to think that it was largely down to them to maintain the motivation to stay involved:

I think it's probably just down to me because ... I tend to take things personally sometimes ... like if someone says to me: "Oh don't act like that. Don't do this," or something, I'll usually take it personally but I know not to now, so ... It's just down to me to get on with it. (YP1)

I think it's down to me, really. (YP3)

Some offered their own reasons for wanting to stay involved throughout:

... we've only got two weeks and we've got to perform and I haven't even seen the script yet ... So I think in about a week's time I'm going to be pulling my hair out going, "I want to get out of this, I don't want to do it ..." But I'll carry on doing it ... I don't want to give up on acting because if I give up on it then I'm never going to do it again because if you can't cope with the stress (and I'm not even a professional actor) ... imagine what its like for a

professional actor; it's 10 times worse ... because you get a script within ... a week of the play and you've got to learn it and you've got to perform it ... (YP2)

I just think ... like ... seeing how it progresses, really, and just how it goes ... if that makes sense? (YP3)

... I want to finish it. (YP6)

One young woman did, however, acknowledge the role that other people could play in helping to maintain enthusiasm:

... the thing is with drama you're constantly working ... and you just knacker yourself out so much to the fact that you actually hate what you're doing ... So when I get to that stage ... I just get so low ... and then ... somebody comes along and they're like ... "Oi, you can do it. You can do this. " It's just praise, praise keeps you going, praise keeps you up there. And people constantly telling you that you can do it is going to make you want to do it ... Or ... the best one's: "What do you think we should do?" That's always the best one ... and you're like "Oh, maybe I'm not that rubbish, they're actually asking me what I want to do". (YP2)

4.3 Follow-up post-performance interviews

Nine follow-up interviews were conducted two to three weeks after the end of the performances. Unfortunately it was not possible to carry out a follow-up interview with YP5, despite several attempts to arrange this. YP5 dropped out of the project during the second week of rehearsals. An interview schedule is included in appendix 3.

4.3.1 Involvement in the project

Role

The young people interviewed all had different roles in the production. One had a singing role (YP1), one had a singing role and a lead acting role (YP2), two had backstage roles (YP3, YP4), but most were "citizens" which involved taking part in group dance and acting scenes (YP6, YP9, YP10).

How long did they stay involved?

Six of the young people stayed involved in the project right the way to the end of the performances. As identified above, one young man (YP5) dropped out of the project during the second week of rehearsals. One young woman in

a backstage role (YP3) only stayed involved until the end of the rehearsals and another young woman, a citizen (YP9), only stayed involved for the first week of the performances. Another young woman (YP8) stayed involved for three and a half weeks, then withdrew, but joined a shorter alternative performance; *City of Ten*. In addition, she returned to support the show, encouraging cast members, selling programmes and welcoming the audiences at all of the performances:

... I still came up and helped out like ... hand out the leaflets and everything so it was alright I got to see the show about 30 times so that was quite good. (YP8)

Why did they stay involved?

The young people gave a number of reasons for staying involved in the project. One young woman had a personal reason for wanting to stay involved and felt that the fact she was doing the play alongside her sister also helped:

... me and my sister were meant to be doing it for my Nan who had died and obviously she didn't, she wouldn't want us to give up on it, so we were doing it for her ... And obviously because ... I'd never done a play before, it's the first time I'd done it and the first time me and [my sister] have done anything together, so I think that's what just kept us going, the fact that we were doing it together and not alone. (YP1)

Most of the young people said that they had stayed involved in the project because they had enjoyed it, however most also gave other reasons for wanting to stay involved. One young woman cited the friendliness of everyone involved:

... I think they always make you feel like really ... welcome there and they put you at ease straight away and ... for me, its because I wasn't doing anything for a while, it was like for me to get out and do and enjoy, you know? (YP3)

A young man said that the staff thought he had a positive attitude towards the project and later confirmed that he had been praised for his efforts:

Because I found it good and they thought I had a good attitude for it because I actually tidied the kitchen three times! (YP4)

Another young man acknowledged that although he had initially been a bit apprehensive about giving up some of his summer holidays, he was now very glad that he had decided to take part:

... I thought like "oh no, the last two weeks of the summer holidays" I didn't think I wanted to do it, but I actually did do it and my friends were like "oh come out" [and] I was like "no I'd rather go there than go out" ... (YP6)

Another young man commented that he doubted his foster parents would have allowed him to drop out. He then found that he was enjoying it so much that he didn't want to drop out anyway:

One, I don't think [my foster parents] would let me back out and two, I didn't want to, it was just too good. The first couple of times I just thought "why do I have to be here? I want to stay in bed and not go" but then um in a while it was actually really good and I wanted to go. (YP10)

Why did they pull out?

Two of those who pulled out of the project prior to the end (YP3 and YP9) cited pressures of other commitments. For example, YP9 explained that although she really enjoyed taking part in the performances, she had just started back at college and found that she was being set a lot of homework to do:

I think after I did the first show I just wanted to do it again ... but like I did miss ... a lot of shows because I was so busy, and I kind of felt guilty but then I thought no because it was really important that I did my college work, for me its very important that I get my education, I think education is very important ... if it had been like in the holiday when I didn't have nothing on ... because I had college and then I had homework and we had quite a lot of homework in the first week and it was only three days and the homework kept coming ... so I thought I really want to keep on top of it ... and I'm the sort of person that I can only do a certain amount of things at a time so I can make sure its all right and do it properly ... (YP9)

She also felt that living in foster care meant that she had more to fit in to her free time than perhaps other young people did:

... I've got quite a busy life ... the thing is if I wasn't in foster care I'd be able to come home to my family and see my family and then we could go off in our own little ways and do our own things but because ... I don't come home to my family, I have to see my family ... in my time ... like we get family contact and stuff but it's just like ...

I'm going away, and I want to go and see my brother before I go away, and so its something I have to do in my own time, so its not like I go home and I see my brother and I sort of say hello, it's not like that ... (YP9)

Another young woman supported this view, citing problems at home as the reason for her withdrawal. Combined with this she found the intensity of the rehearsals overwhelming, and in particular, the fact that she needed to turn up to rehearse reliably/consistently. Though as the following quote indicates, not being involved in the final performances had upset her.

... it was like the last few rehearsals you had to come otherwise you couldn't do it and it was like one of the main rehearsals I missed so I couldn't do it ... [I: How did you feel about that?] I was quite gutted to be honest ... (YP8)

Getting involved

Most of the young people appeared to have found it fairly easy to get involved in the project. The main difficulties experienced centred on getting to and from the Tobacco Factory, particularly when the rehearsals/performances finished late at night. Whilst some of the young people were fortunate enough to have foster parents/carers who were willing to give them lifts, others had to rely on public transport. This sometimes led to problems of reliability, particularly late at night:

Yeah that was a bit hard especially like leaving later in the evening when there there's like no buses at all [laughs] ... well I was waiting so long for one bus I walked like through Bedminster to the next one ... (YP3)

It also meant that there was a financial cost of getting involved. It is clear that this would have caused problems for some of the young people if the Theatre Company had not stepped in to offer financial assistance:

... well there was a few times where we did have a bit of financial problems like me and my sister but Hilary and Heather were great, they always like helped us and sorted it out for us, so we always did manage to get there on time. (YP1)

I started to get a bus here and Myrtle paid for me to get a bus pass which was really good ... and then on the three nights I did the government thing, because it was so

late they provided me with a taxi home. When I did my back in they provided me with a taxi to the hospital and so they have been absolutely spot on, perfect, nothing has been difficult; it's all been pretty easy and sorted really. (YP2)

4.3.2 Rehearsals

How did they find the rehearsals?

The young people had different views about how they found the rehearsals. This may have been partly due to the amount of prior experience they had. For example, one young person without any prior experience found the rehearsals a bit stressful:

... they were good, a bit nerve racking and pressured but it all turned out alright in the end so it was all good. (YP1)

Whereas, another young person with a fair amount of previous experience, including with the Myrtle Theatre Company, thought the rehearsals were quite relaxed:

... the rehearsals were kind of actually really laid back, not like laid back as in "oh we will do this when we do it", it was kind of um, it wasn't as stressed out as I thought it would be because I was like one of the older actors and it was kind of learn your lines and get together with the people that you are working with and work on your scene and then we will put together and see ... what we've got and see how it can go together. So it was pretty laid back, pretty sort of ... your own responsibility so it was kind of nice ... it wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be, compared to last year, it nearly killed me. (YP2)

A few of the young people said that had found the rehearsals a bit repetitive and therefore boring, particularly in the initial stages. However, some later acknowledged that this was in fact necessary in order to produce a high quality production and commented on how great it was once they started to see the whole play coming together:

I watched loads [of rehearsals]. I got bored of it at one point ... because we did it over and over again it was really boring ... but as soon as I saw the first [performance] I thought "oh that looks really good". It hit me. (YP4 - backstage)

I thought as soon as I did the performance over and over again it was going to be like

annoying (laughs) ... [but] it was good actually ... it gets a bit much but then its better because then you remember it all. (YP9)

... I just felt, the first like couple of times I felt ten til four, ten til four, why do we have to stay quite a long time? Its as long as school, but sometimes you just get a bit bored, because you go over the things time and time again but I knew I had to because else it just wouldn't be that good ... I did everything I could and in the end it turned out to be pretty cool ... And then as it went on, it didn't feel so long, it felt quite short. (YP10)

One young woman expresses in the following quote how the intensity of the rehearsals impacted on her relationship with her little girl:

... it was very stressful and it was a long period of time, for me it was a long period even more because I couldn't see my daughter every day like I wanted to. Um so I was missing her plus I was carrying on doing this so it was a lot more stressful for me than I thought it was going to be but I'm glad I done it now it was amazing. (YP7)

Those who were working backstage worked on a wide range of different tasks and seemed to enjoy what they were doing:

... helping out with everything really ... all of it costumes and make-up ... I really enjoyed it yeah ... (YP3)

Painting, um helping out with the lighting, I messed about with some lights at one point um yeah I did prop moving ... I went to pick up stuff like lights ... I liked building the best ... chairs for the singers to sit on ... I built all 10 of them in two days, it was quite hard actually. (YP4)

Amount of preparation time

Most of the young people appeared to think that there had been enough preparation time:

Yes, it worked alright, it looked alright so yeah it was more than enough I think. (YP2)

Yeah we did, even though it was only two weeks which normally takes a year to do like a whole play, you're rehearsing for a whole year but it didn't this time, it took two weeks. (YP4 - backstage)

Yeah, I didn't have as long as I did for my school plays but then again ... I had longer in one way because um in the other ones we just did it for half an hour at lunchtime ... (YP10)

Although four thought that it had perhaps been a bit tight:

... I think it was a bit of a squeeze, everyone started panicking and everything but it wasn't that bad, it was alright. (YP1)

... we managed to get there in the end, it was a rush but we did it! (YP3 - backstage)

... it was the fact that we only had um like two weeks to rehearse the whole play, um plus we had to get used to all the new people and just the stresses of not getting it right first time and stuff like that, its just like normal stresses that you get when you are trying something new ... (YP7)

Some of the young people acknowledged that although it was tiring, a block of back-to-back rehearsals was probably the best way to do it:

... [the director] was ... really like firm with it and when we felt tired we would say I am going to go and sit down she was like no you have to do this, there's a deadline, so it was kind of good. But at the time I was a bit like upset but now I look back and I think well if it wasn't for that then we wouldn't have such an amazing performance ... And when I look back on it I am really proud of myself and everyone else. (YP6)

No I think rehearsals should be like day after day ... cos it's fresh in your mind then the next day and you can carry on. (YP9)

Learning lines/parts and skills needed for backstage roles

Most of the young people didn't appear to have had too many problems learning their lines/parts or the songs:

... with the songs, it was alright, it wasn't that bad cos you just learn the rhythm of the song and then the words and everything. (YP1)

*... because a lot of the scenes were the actual *City of One* and *Social Worker* and *Liam* and all that sort of stuff so there wasn't a lot of working on me and *Liam*. Um so I had more time to sit back and learn my lines and it was really, really easily written for me as well because we were just*

insulting each other so it didn't actually matter 100% if it wasn't the right words as long as it went in the same way. (YP2)

... sometimes I'd forget what the next scene comes down so I was like "oh no", but after doing it over and over again it just flows quite easily so it was good. (YP9)

... they were really catchy songs so they were really easy to learn and grab hold of ... me and my sister were practicing every day and it was just kind of those songs that you get in your head so you are practicing it as you are walking through the streets and stuff. (YP7)

The two young people who had backstage roles felt that they did have the necessary skills to be able to perform their role:

Yeah to be honest, I mean ... I went in not really knowing what I was going to be doing so it was like ... yeah I think I did ... (YP3)

... everything was quite easy ... they tell me how to do stuff like how to use lighting and stuff like that. I got that quite quickly because it was computer stuff. (YP4)

Impact of personal experiences of the care system

Some of the young people said that they had been able to share their own personal experiences of the care system with the other cast members and felt that this may have helped them to better understand the play and also to get into character:

I did speak to um one of the actors ... who played the sister, and obviously she wasn't in care herself so she doesn't know what its like but ... we were talking to her about why we were in care and everything and she was trying to relate to it and I think she learnt a lot because she didn't know anything about it before and now she does. So, everyone learnt ... like a lot about it from their characters even if they weren't in care ... (YP1)

Well I've always said to them like if you want any advice at all ... then just ask me. I can remember I was going home once and they called me in and they were asking like all different questions about foster carers because Heather and Ross wanted to portray realistic foster carers and um I think they found it really, really useful because I could see by watching it that they had

taken a few things that I had said, not all of it because like otherwise they are not making it their own ... but I could see they were using some bits and there was one bit when Liam ... is going mad and he screams to Heather "you are not my mum I fucking hate you" and that was what I said to him that's what every single foster kid says ... I think they were quite grateful because playing the parts they had to play was really hard, really, really hard for them to do ... But I think they found it quite useful and took as much as they could off me and made it their own through that. (YP2)

I think children in the play that were in care had the experience and put loads more emotion into it like it was kind of their way of speaking out to people and letting them know. [I: And did it really feel like that?] ... it didn't at the beginning because obviously we didn't know what we were going to get out of it but towards the end it just felt like everyone was starting to listen and take in what we were going through and how much it took out of us to do something like this. (YP7)

Others spoke about being able to relate to the play because of their own personal experiences:

... I think I related a lot ... to what was going on in Liam's life and things like that ... so yeah ... I could sort of relate to why he was doing certain stuff, it was really good. (YP9)

One young man felt that he had learnt a lot from speaking to the other cast members about their experiences of growing up, whether this had been in care or not:

... we were just chatting about it and like people that you'd think are in care, aren't in care or their family has had hard problems which I think is good because ... you don't feel so left alone because if you don't know any children in care you feel like you are the only one really and not just like the only one, but like you are the only one with like them sort of problems. So like if your family beat you, you think "oh no, I'm the only one that my family beats" but you are not really because there's other children and that's what I found out through this play. (YP6)

One young woman, who left prior to the final performances, felt she was much more interested in developing the dance routines rather than

discussing her care experiences. In the following quote she articulates how in reality, involvement had not changed the way she felt at all:

... I have been in care for like near enough all my life so it didn't really make me feel any different because I have been through a hell of a lot of foster placements, children homes and all that so it didn't really make me feel any different about it. (YP8)

Another young woman felt that the performances had given young people in care the opportunity to demonstrate that they could achieve:

... it was our chance to tell people and to show people that we have got talent and we showed them and we showed them more than what we were expecting. It was absolutely amazing, everyone put their all into that cabaret, because it was what we wanted to do, we made that cabaret. (YP7)

Relationships with other cast members

Most of the young people appeared to have got on well with the other cast members:

Good ... I made quite a lot of new friends. (YP1)

... really well, I got like um a few good friends ... three are absolute legends I love them to bits, I wouldn't change them for the world and I am so lucky to have met those three because they are absolutely wicked. (YP2)

Yeah I got on with them really well yeah. (YP3)

One young man commented on the fun he had during lunch breaks:

... I even learnt how to play poker there ... with monopoly money ... Like during the lunch breaks and when we weren't on stage our group, we were just sitting at a table in the backroom ... and we were playing two card poker, it was really funny. (YP10)

Importantly, several young people talked about how the cast was mixed, in terms of including young people from the care system and those who were not. This mix meant that young people did not feel stigmatised by their care label. It also gave them the opportunity to get to know young people who generally they may have felt they had nothing in common with, breaking down barriers.

Yeah it was with everybody, like nobody knew who was in care unless they said and obviously

that kind of proves that children in care don't have labels. Um but yeah we all just got on with it and got on with everybody, we was all part of a team no matter whether we were in care or not in care, we was all working to get the same point across. (YP7)

However, one young woman recalled a bit of trouble with someone who later pulled out:

... yeah I got on with most people ... except for [name], well [name] I did get on with her because I've known [name] for ages but she started being horrible to the other girls and I was like in the middle of it and I was like ... "I don't really want to be here" ... because I know [name] and I didn't want to be horrible to her but then ... I didn't understand why she was being horrible to them so ... I didn't want to get pulled into it ... cos she used to just say things like "oh I'm going to hit them" and things like that and it was like "whoa" ... for no reason, like they hadn't done nothing you know, so I don't know, I think it was jealousy, or it was just, I don't know. (YP9)

As inferred in the previous quote, issues of conflict between cast members were a significant enough issue for one young woman to leave. She articulates in the following quote that even with the support of theatre staff, how the conflict impacted on her involvement:

I think they were quite understanding to be honest, like they were offering to let me be in the cabaret and everything but the thing about being involved ... in the cabaret was because it was my chance to actually prove something, I didn't really have to prove anything but I felt that and like Heather and Hilary and everyone said that the dance in the cabaret was meant to be my dance but [name] was taking over and it all just kicked off from there to be honest I walked out quite a lot. (YP8)

Another young woman hinted that there might have been a few problems between the various cast members, although these were sorted out through discussion with the theatre staff:

There was a lot of um conversations with the director and everything about like if you felt left out or we were being categorised because we were in care or stuff like that and then it would just evolve into big conversations and then everything would eventually get sorted. (YP1)

Most of the young people also seemed to have got on well with the professional actors and singers involved:

I got on really well with the singers as well because obviously I was with them as well, and the band as well, and Heather and Ross because they played my mum and dad which was really, really nice ... I'm really close to them its just like a nice little family unit going on like me and Kos [Liam], Ross and Heather, it was really nice. (YP2)

Yeah, the adult actors ... they were really good. (YP10)

A couple commented on the useful help and advice they had received:

... I felt they were really, really good to adapt to the fact that a lot of us actually hadn't done a lot of theatre and they were really good to adapt to that and to sort of like give some time. Um they were really, really funny, just really great, made me feel really welcome, really um confident and always had something good to say about me and they would never, ever put me down for anything and gave me some good advice ... (YP2)

... they gave me a lot of positive advice ... it helped me out really much because like some days I wasn't really concentrating that much because I was hungry or wanted sweets or something stupid like that but they was like "oh [YP6] pull through it" and as they've ... given me that advice ... I've just been a better person really. (YP6)

One young woman, however, felt that with the exception of the young man who had played Liam, the professional actors had remained a bit distant from the rest of the cast:

... the professional actors were a bit, like, keep themselves to themselves, which I found them a bit stand offish but ... the one that played Liam ..., he was quite nice actually ... Yeah, cos he was working with us and so ... he talked to us so that was good, but all the older ones were kind of ... they stayed in their profession ... I felt a kind of like a disconnection ... where they keep themselves to themselves but then they still talked to us but ... it felt like I was talking to someone that I never talked to before in that way, like, and I suppose its because they are professionals so they have to stay in that role. (YP9)

In addition, the relationships with the cast appeared to consolidate over time. As the following quote demonstrates, camaraderie within the group also meant young people felt more committed to see the project through:

... and because of the cast because we were all kind of like, none of us let each other down, if we were supposed to be there on a performance we done it and I wasn't prepared to let anybody down. (YP7)

4.3.3 Performances

Nerves

Several young people spoke about feeling nervous before the performances, although for most this appeared to improve with time:

Very nerve racking, I was absolutely pooing my pants on the first night and for about three days I was absolutely pooing myself ... But after that it was alright, it was all good. (YP1)

... on the first night I was a bit like "oh god" but as the nights went on it was just getting better and better and better. (YP6)

The first night I was a bit nervous that I would forget something but after the first night it was really easy. (YP10)

One young woman felt that nerves helped to contribute to a good performance:

I'm stood back stage and I am absolutely crapping it, always the best thing to do though, if you are not nervous then you are not good, that's what I say to myself if I am not nervous then I am not going to do a good performance ... (YP2)

She also highlighted the role that other cast members could play in helping to allay people's nerves:

... it was great because I never had to be worried about anything because [Liam] always had my back, do you know what I mean? It was really, really weird ... you couldn't see that, but if I felt nervous or anything he would be there like "you are fine, it's alright, don't worry about it" because although he is the same age as me ... he has done a bit more than I have in acting so he was really, really reassuring ... (YP2)

A young man spoke about his own strategy for dealing with nerves and suggested that this would be good advice for any performer:

... like other actors they are like "look at the stage, oh my god I'm going to freak out" but I just be my own person, stay in character and that's any advice I would give to anyone is to stay in character, forget about the audience then you'll just be alright. (YP6)

Energy

One young woman commented on how tiring it was going to college every day then going straight to the Tobacco Factory to do a pre-show rehearsal, followed by a performance and sometimes an after-show talk, and then having to get up early for college the next day:

I found it really hard this time because I was doing a lot of stuff ... the first week was a doddle for me ... like the rehearsals went fine, got to the first week of performances, fine, second week absolutely exhausting. I was just like "I can't do this any more ... I just don't want to do it", because I was basically coming in on Monday, doing rehearsals, doing the play and then doing a talk with the Government, Tuesday that was exactly the same, Wednesday I came in I had the rehearsals for a cabaret, then did the play, then did the Government talk and then Thursday I had to come in, I had rehearsals for the cabaret, play and then a talk ... Well I was leaving college early so I was doing college all day on the Wednesday, Thursday, Friday plus coming in and doing rehearsals so it was way tiring ... And getting home at half past eleven and then getting up again at seven to go to college, it was very tiring. (YP2)

This view was echoed by another cast member who went on to explain that because he enjoyed it so much when he got to the theatre he didn't really mind:

... I had to come here straight from school some days ... some days I had to walk which is like really far but when I come here I'm happy, that's the only reason I stayed ... its tiring though but I still got here. (YP6)

Enjoyment

In spite of some of the feelings expressed above, it is clear that all of the young people really enjoyed taking part in the performances:

So being on stage, I love it, it's the biggest rush you can ever get and being cheered and that ... (YP2)

I felt really, really positive ... It was good, it was like a buzz, yeah. (YP6)

... it was like a thrill from like when we was first going on we was like really nervous but half way through the play everyone was just enjoying their performance they were putting their all into it and um it was amazing ... if I would have thought about it two years ago I don't think I would be doing something like this and I am just glad that I got the opportunity. (YP7)

... after I did it I wanted to do it again ... cos I think I made some mistakes ... I was like "I want to do it again now!" (YP9)

... it just felt really good because um you just felt like really alive on stage ... (YP10)

One young woman said that she actually found it difficult to come out of her character by the end of the performances:

... it was just like second nature to me by the end of it, the second week I did Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday night as Kelly so by Wednesday it was kind of like ... life. It was kind of like I come here, I get into character and it was just like the next day ... I became Kelly and my attitude really, really stunk as well because you become so much this character that your attitude changes and I got to Wednesday and I was in college and everyone was like "your attitude sucks" but ... its like you become so emotionally involved ... I was like, I just can't help the fact I am really, really sorry, I just can't get out of character because I am so used to being it. But it was just like I was Kelly, [YP2] had gone, do you know what I mean? (YP2)

Audience feedback

It is clear that the young people had received feedback as to how the performances had gone:

... well everyone enjoyed it, everyone thought it was brilliant um my boyfriend did mention to me that he could tell that I was nervous ... at one point when he first came to see it, but he came to see it a second time and he said that I looked a lot more relaxed, so I think obviously everyone just started to calm down a bit and go with the flow. (YP1)

I think it went well, yeah um I saw one of the girls who was in it a few days ago and she said it went brilliantly and everyone

enjoyed it ... And I've seen some people who watched the performance and they said it was brilliant ... (YP3 - backstage)

One young man who had a backstage role watched nearly all of the performances, and he too was really pleased with how well the performances went:

I thought it was amazing, I thought like when everything I saw, I just thought "ooh this is absolutely amazing" ... (YP4 - backstage)

One young woman spoke about the thrill of taking part in the curtain call as this was the first chance she had to find out what the audience thought about her solo performance:

... the very last night we had a different curtain call ... and me and [Liam] had our own bow and we had a standing ovation and we were kind of like oh my god, I'd never had that before so I was very, very shocked and that's the best bit of the play, believe it or not is the curtain call ... because nobody ever clapped ... at the end of my song when everybody else's did, but then it went straight into another scene so it was kind of understandable ... and I didn't know what people thought and I am like oh my god ... do people like this? Do people fall asleep? All that sort of stuff. So at the end of it when you get a cheer you are just like, oh my god, people actually did enjoy it ... (YP2)

She also spoke about how pleased she was to see that the performance had moved people to tears:

... and when I was playing the singer I would ... watch the audience because you can see the audience from up there but you can't see the audience when you're on stage ... and the amount of people that were crying and I thought right sorted, we've done this, I have never felt so happy to make someone cry in my life, its really stupid but it was kind of like, we are crying because this has touched us, and I was like great, if we have touched you we have done our job right, we have done what we have come here to do. So it's great, it was absolutely amazing to see the audience's reaction. (YP2)

4.3.4 Gains

What did they get out of being involved?

Six young people spoke about gaining confidence as a result of their involvement in the project:

... confidence definitely, a lot of confidence ... (YP1)

Confidence ... my confidence has grown, I've never been under-confident to be honest ... but I have got that little bit more confidence, you can't explain what part of confidence you've got but you just know that you feel so much more confident about yourself and the fact that I came here and I made friends and they like me for who I am has made me confident and the fact that I got a good part, one of the main parts and people liked me made me even more confident and the fact that people came up to me and said my singing was amazing just made me feel absolutely amazing ... (YP2)

... more confidence ... because like on the first day I didn't think I could do anything and be myself but when you mould in to it and relax yourself you can find your different groups and you can talk to certain people about certain stuff and that's really good ... (YP6)

... the confidence of being an actor ... (YP10)

Seven young people spoke about learning new skills or improvements to their existing acting/singing/dancing/backstage skills:

... my singing and my acting skills definitely increased, definitely got better and I can see the faults in myself now without anybody having to tell me ... (YP2)

... just um well experience really ... like in the costumes, like before I had no idea how it all worked and what to do ... but now I know how it works ... (YP3 - backstage)

... lighting boards ... stage management and how they do it. (YP4 - backstage)

... one time when I was being scared I just thought of stuff that scared me and if like times I feel happy, I think of things that made me happy ... and then you just think of a character and then you just keep with that character all the way through ... And now I think that I've learnt so much that I've become a better person and a better actor. (YP6)

... I have heard different parts of my voice that I didn't think I had. Um I have been able to experiment with my voice a lot more so it's been um like a come through

for my voice and my confidence at the same time. (YP7)

Well I hadn't done dancing for about three or four years but ... like [the administrative director] and that were saying from going to not dancing at all to being an actual choreographer for a whole dance its something not many people can achieve so I was pretty proud of myself for that. (YP8)

I learnt a good few lessons that I could have learnt at school like um your voice comes from your diaphragm, in a way it was like a second school. (YP10)

One young woman specifically mentioned the benefits of working alongside professional actors:

... the adult actors, because they are professionals, they taught me so much which is absolutely amazing because you don't actually work with professional actors usually until you are professional yourself. So to have that opportunity and to be able to be given constructive criticism from professional actors is absolutely amazing because you think, well they know what they are doing, they know what they are saying, take it in and do what they say, so that was wicked working with them. (YP2)

She also reiterated the gains from the new friendships she had developed:

... friends, absolutely amazing, absolutely spot on amazing friends, I wouldn't change for the world. (YP2)

One young woman thought that she had become more considerate of other people's needs:

... a lot more understanding of other people and their problems and not just thinking about myself. (YP1)

And another thought that she had learnt how to communicate more effectively:

... I have got a lot more of an outlook on people and um I know now that I can be heard and that if I have something to say I can say it but I just need to say it to the right people instead of just shouting it out. (YP7)

One young woman focused on what she thought the audience had got out of the performance:

... I can relate to a lot of it but I think it was really good, I don't know what I've got out of it really, I think from watching I think you get a lot out of it, watching its more like you can see it but being in it I think it was

good to be able to take part ... in something like that. But I think watching it was um ... I think it hits like inside you ... (YP9)

Alternatives to risk taking

Two young women highlighted how in their view, involvement in the Arts offered them alternatives to risk taking behaviours, such as drug taking, drinking or risky sex. Both felt that during their involvement in the project they had been carried along by the 'buzz' and feeling purposeful, and had not been so drawn to risk taking activities. In fact one young woman went as far as to suggest it had significantly changed her view of herself, and perhaps her life:

You can change your mind into so many different characters and you can become so many different people and it just lets you be able to like let yourself be free in the mind of someone else and no one can judge you on it and to have that feeling that no one can judge you its like you get more confident and you are not scared of acting like yourself around people because obviously ... You could be like happy and hyper in one play and you can be down and depressed in another one or you could just be crazy ... You just feel like everyone around you is doing everything to make sure that this play comes out at the end perfect. So we are all working hard but we don't realize we are because we are also having fun, we are becoming different people by the different day if you know what I mean and it just feels like you can open up to people and let them know the real you without them judging you. (YP7)

4.3.5 Feelings now that it's over

Some of the young people were clearly sad that the project was over:

Really sad ... I didn't have time to think about it because I was in Spain like as soon as it finished ... But coming back in, like I got off the bus and I was stood outside ... and I sort of thought where is everyone? This is really horrible, I want everyone to be here ... So it was really, really weird and then coming in and me and [name] went in to see the stage and we were like, this is horrible, it's an end of an era but then I suppose you have got to move on haven't you, because it happens all the time. But its when you get so close to people and like the runs are so long and its like a months

worth of living with somebody really isn't it, you get really close to them. (YP2)

Well it's a bit sad because we all had to leave. I hope some of the same people might be doing it again like ... so that I know people when I walk in ... (YP9)

Three young people were, however, able to put a positive spin on it:

Oh it's horrible, I want to go back! But ... it's good though cos I feel like I've achieved something now ... (YP1)

It's really horrible but we're all going out on Wednesday so it's all good. (YP2)

Upset but I am happy because I have turned into a better person and in the future hopefully I will get to do more stuff. (YP6)

One young man spoke about having nothing to do now that the performances were over:

I found it fun, really, really fun. I miss it now because I don't have anything to do ... I find it like weird because [the professionals are] all there doing plays and I'm staying here without it. (YP4)

Another, however, was pleased that it was over, as the end of the project coincided with the start of the new academic year, and as a result he now found that he had a lot of homework to do:

... it feels a bit strange but in a way I'm glad because it leaves me free to like get on with ... my homework and things like that ... (YP10)

Most of the young people indicated that they would like to take part in further productions in the future:

... I know there's something else going on at the Myrtle Theatre Company by some other people, which I want to do cos it's at the Tobacco Factory ... So I just want to go back there and do it because its there [laughs]. (YP1)

Yeah hopefully ... if they do another production I'd like to get involved backstage again ... (YP3)

... that would be good, yeah if they were like ... if I could do them, then yeah. (YP9)

One young man was hopeful that the Myrtle Theatre Company would be able to gain funding to take the production to another location:

... I'm hoping they're going to London which they said they might do ... so if they do, they'll bring one of their groups along

and stage managers which I hope that it will be me cos I like going. (YP4)

Another young man took the opportunity to stress his belief that more young people should get involved in initiatives like this:

... I just want to say that like if you are a child in care, you should like step forward and do what you want to do ... Its not just children in care its any children who don't really have the advantages to do that because they don't know what people to get in contact with, they should just really look around, if you get what I mean, because you never know they could be excellent and go straight to TV. (YP6)

During one interview, a young woman (YP8) highlighted how she and other cast members had become involved with a directing company who were making a short film about young people in care, which they were enthusiastic about.

Chapter Five Findings from Theatre Company and Carers

5.1 Views from Myrtle Theatre Company

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the two theatre company directors in the week following the final performances. A number of issues were raised during these interviews concerning the lessons learnt through *City Of One* and recommendations for future work of this nature. An interview schedule is included in appendix 4.

5.1.1 General perceptions

For the Company, the experience of *City of One* confirmed their belief that providing high quality participatory theatre opportunities for children and young people in care can have a positive impact on their lives. This impact was all the greater by making that opportunity part of a professional production. Overall it was felt that the experience of both directing and managing the production had been highly intense and challenging, though the Company had learnt a great deal. The Company Directors were particularly encouraged by the developments they saw take place over the project period, both in terms of theatre skill acquisition and the sense of achievement the young people felt by being part of the project and final performance. From the Directors perspective a key outcome was the transition that occurred in young people. At the

beginning of the project young people had needed high levels of support, however, by the end they were more self-reliant and pro-active in their contributions, as well as more reliable in their involvement. The Directors also commented on the positive aspects of partnership working with other agencies such as Bristol Children and Young People's Services, and in particular the Government Office for the South West. Examples of collaborative working included the involvement in post-show debates and raising the profile and recognition of the work and its impact on young people in care.

The Company recruited a number of highly skilled professionals from the field to oversee musical direction, composition, choreography, lighting, design and production, plus a number of highly experienced professional actors to perform alongside the young cast. This enabled the development of a high quality production in an extremely short period of time and served to raise the aspirations of the young people involved. A number of these professionals had a great deal of experience in working with young people. However, it was felt that in future more consideration should be given to supporting professionals in their understanding of working with vulnerable children who sometimes display challenging behaviour.

5.1.2 Assessing young people's support needs

Although a number of support staff were employed to provide practical care and encouragement to the young people during rehearsals, any difficult emotional or challenging behaviour was, in the first instance, managed by the artistic and administrative directors. This combined with the volume of tasks associated with making the performance happen often meant the demands were too great and left theatre company staff exhausted. Staff were also sensitive to how the story within *City of One* may impact on young people's feelings about themselves and their own life stories. Anticipation of these issues in the future and more collaboration



from agencies working with children in care, could mean involvement of specialist staff to provide the level of support necessary. Although Bristol Children and Young People's Services provided support staff through their advocacy agency, some difficulties did arise. Lessons were learnt about the need to ensure staff consistency, provision of skilled youth practitioners and a more detailed picture of young people's individual needs prior to starting rehearsals.

Despite Myrtle Theatre Company's long history and extensive experience of working with children and young people in care, the directors were taken aback by the volume of young people with experience of care that wanted, and had the ability, to take part. Similarly it was hard to anticipate the degree and intensity of their needs when they came together as a cast in a highly pressurised artistic environment. The combination of young people within the cast both with and without care experiences was a great asset, but it was also a large amount of people and relationships to support. Due to the challenges of involving young people who often find sustaining involvement in projects difficult, passion and commitment by the creative provider is essential and needs to be harnessed and supported. A production the size and artistic quality of *City of One* needs substantial financial support. In the future it is important that additional funding is found to further support involvement and participation of young people who are potentially vulnerable.

5.1.3 Meeting the financial costs

The costs of this production were met by Myrtle Theatre Company as part of their on going commitment to working with this group of young people, including the active involvement of their Patron Catherine Johnson. Some additional support was provided by the Bristol Local Authority in terms of two full time support workers during the two week rehearsal period. Although many professionals within Bristol Children and Young people's Services actively supported and encouraged young people's participation and the Government Office for the South West funded the evaluation, future projects would need to think carefully about possible funding arrangements and collaborations to replicate this work or move it on. In terms of individual young people Myrtle Theatre Company are highly aware of the responsibility a project such as this raises in terms of both sustaining and moving on young people who have taken part, in terms of their own

aspirations within performing arts. To this end, the Company have undertaken follow-up one to one work with young people identifying any new opportunities or supporting young people around potential educational opportunities within the creative arts. There has also been a reunion evening that brought the cast together to take part in a Comedy Improvisation session in a continued attempt to maintain young people's enthusiasm and interest.

5.2 Views from foster carers and residential workers

Interviews were carried out with four foster carers and one residential worker who had supported young people involved in the production and delivery of the performance. The young people carers discussed were between 10 and 15 years old, all were boys with the exception of one young woman. Two of the young people discussed had identified learning difficulties. An interview schedule is included in appendix 5.

5.2.1 Challenges to involvement

All those interviewed recognised a number of challenges facing young people in terms of their sustained involvement in the project. Carers suggested that young people because of their care experiences and sometimes just because of their age found it difficult to maintain involvement in activities. For some involvement in drama groups in the past had failed, one young man had been doing really well and then because of some temporary behavioural difficulties was asked to leave. It was felt that for young people 'to stick with it' they needed a lot of support and encouragement from families. In addition some young people had articulated a level of nervousness of being asked to do activities they had not done before or perhaps felt they would not be very good at:

Um his confidence is so much better, in the beginning he said Mum, he calls me Mum, Mum I will do anything but please don't let them make me dance and I said you don't have to do anything you don't want to do. But gradually, he is a good little dancer, he is gradually coming out of himself that way, one minute he has got lots of confidence and another way he hasn't got any, a lot of it is front. (FC4)

Two foster carers (FC2, FC4) talked about how they had prepared their children for their involvement by being clear about what their

commitment in the project would involve. For two young participants it meant re-arranging their annual visit to birth family relatives. This was felt to be a big compromise but one the young people wanted to make, to enable them to attend the rehearsals. These foster parents also explained to their children the reality of involvement particularly how sitting around waiting to practice during rehearsals could feel boring and repetitious. They also talked about the issues raised by having children that were often very compliant not feeling able to withdraw from things even when they were not enjoying them. In these instances carers had to make sure young people were not feeling pressurised into continued involvement. However, both felt that their children had enjoyed *City of One* and would miss it enormously.

Another foster carer (FC1) highlighted just how much cajoling and pushing her son had needed to keep going during the rehearsal period. He did have concentration issues, but in addition found the waiting around during rehearsals boring. He had liked the older children and was drawn towards them rather than children of his own age but if they were not around he struggled to stay motivated. The carer suggested that she had also found it difficult to motivate him to keep attending the performances. It appeared that once he had experienced the initial thrill of involvement he had lost interest and did not particularly get a buzz out of performing either. The reason for his continued attendance was fear of letting his co-performers and staff at the theatre company down.

5.2.2 What young people got out of it

Mostly carers felt young people had got an enormous amount out of their involvement in *City of One*. Carers highlighted how young people had enjoyed their experiences, learnt a wide range of skills, increased their awareness and understanding of their care experience and blossomed as a result of their involvement. However, perhaps one of the most important benefits was friendship. In the following quote a carer highlights the significance of making friends for her own son:

I think it's done our boy a lot of good because he actually finds friendships very difficult ... I am not saying it in an unkind way, but ... he is not an ordinary teenager. But he has come here, everyone has accepted him, nobody has teased him,

nobody has laughed at him, he will come in the door going hello to everybody as he came in ... I think [name] really it's done him a world of good ... (FC2)

Another area mentioned by carers was skills acquisition, including improved communication, dance, singing and performing skills, and for those involved in backstage work, technical skills. In terms of self esteem and well-being, carers focused on improved confidence, a better sense of self and heightened awareness of the impact of their own care experiences. Recognition was given to the challenges young people in care can have in making and keeping friends. The residential worker highlighted how often it was 'falling out between young people' that hindered continued involvement in activities (RW1). The project was seen as a good opportunity for making friends, developing team working skills, learning how to compromise and get along with others.

The wide range of things carers felt young people got out of their experience was summed up in the following quote by a residential worker, which develops the theme of confidence in terms of the development of pride:

... during her involvement it was the happiest I had ever seen her. I noticed a marked difference in her, her main interest is dance and drama, normally she finds it almost impossible to keep going, but watching her this time was miraculous, for her I think it was amazing. The value of performing arts is clear, it made her take pride in herself. Her relationship with her mother is not great, but she was keen to take the programme, to show her mum, she was sort of saying look what I am doing? She appeared to want recognition for involvement. She was proud of herself; it improved her self esteem and her sense of belonging. She had for the most part got along with a group and 'felt normal'. Her skills improved; her dancing skills got better and her life skills. (RW1)

There was the capacity within the project to involve young people who were interested in back stage and technical activities. One foster carer (FC2) suggested that her foster son had enjoyed this role so much he would have been at the theatre every evening if she had let him. This was a real change as previously he was reluctant to join clubs or community activities. She felt the company had created a real feeling of community amongst the participants and that the adults had

taken an interest in them as individuals. She gave an example of how the staff had bought her son a tool box as he was working back stage on his birthday. Another carer (FC3) focused on the ways the staff within the company had supported the development of his son's technical skills and what that meant to him:

But he's got on all right, he enjoyed ... because they took him around. I think they had to find things for him to do too because technical things there are so many things you can do but other times they are not. But he's felt important and that's really built him up. (FC3)

Not all of the young people were able to see through their involvement to the final set of performances. Both residential and foster carers commented that because staff were encouraging and positive about contributions made, young people never felt they could not return. The residential worker in particular commented on how the company had found alternative options so that young people did not have to stop their involvement completely. This included undertaking a number of workshops in a smaller group to develop a small additional performance piece called '*City of Ten*', which the young people involved performed to their fellow cast members. Other activities included selling programmes at the performances, helping with dressing and make up and attendance at the after show discussion groups.

5.2.3 Raising the issue of care

Four of the five carers interviewed suggested that involvement had definitely raised issues and feelings associated with young people's care experience. Carers had seen the performance often several times and commented that much of the content had poignancy and resonance with both them as foster carers and the young people in terms of their care experiences. Often this was perceived as a good thing as the performance became a vehicle for young people to talk in a way they hadn't done before. However, as the following quote illustrates this also meant that sometimes young people felt upset or sad:

He's loved coming, he's really enjoyed it. Um to start it might have upset him a little bit because at the beginning when we first had a meeting down here with ... [the artistic director], she spoke to the boys of what the production was about and I said to [name] "does this remind you of anybody" and he was able to say "yes me"

because it did. I mean and it is it almost could be written for [name]. But he was able to acknowledge that and that's the first time he has acknowledged anything so that showed me he has moved on a little and then the play he was in a scene and he said that reminded him of things, what things were like for him. So I felt he was actually speaking about things when mostly he will keep it under ... he wont talk much about his past. (FC4)

This carer identified that previously she had not been able to do any life story work as he was not ready. But since his involvement in the performance and the things that had been said since this play she was feeling that he might be ready to acknowledge his past and start to come to terms with it. This extended to some young people showing an awareness of how their behaviour may have impacted on their carers; with one young man suggesting that:

"I now know what you and dad feel like sometimes" (FC4).

In addition, three carers (FC2, FC3, FC4) highlighted how very different care experiences can be. The children in their care had secure placements. However, at different times during the project the young people had heard stories from young people that had not only had multiple placements but were expressing the traumatising nature of their experiences both prior to and on coming into care. These stories had generated questions, fear and concerns about their co-performers but also about what might happen to them in the future. These fears were quickly allayed with reassurance but carers felt it had raised their children's awareness about the care system.

5.2.4 Areas of success and areas for improvement

Generally carers felt that the organisation of the project was excellent and communication from the company could not have been better. If there were changes in the programme parents were sent notes home or telephoned. In addition, carers highlighted how professionals on the project gave feedback about how well young people were doing and discussed how they could collaborate more effectively to support young people. Several carers were pleased that the project included a mix of children, not just those from within the care system, as they believed that their children did not want to be seen as different.

However, several respondents did mention that they had concerns about the intensity of the demands on the young people once the school term started. However, as this quote illustrates, young people found ways of coping:

... maybe the only thing I guess for me it might have been better, although it wouldn't have made any difference, when the first week they were back to school in those first few days and they were doing like dress rehearsals on an evening and it was just getting them back to school and I would have wanted them to have an early night normally if its not a holiday I would want them to catch up on a bit of sleep. But it worked out OK actually, they were OK and they were very good because I did say if they wanted to do it, on the nights they aren't performing they need to have earlier nights and the three of them were pretty good ... (FC4)

However, the residential worker went on to suggest that the very intense nature of the rehearsal schedule was an issue for those young people who find it hard to commit over time. She felt the high expectations placed on young people and the intensity of the rehearsal process may have made some of them feel overwhelmed. Nevertheless, she recognised that it was difficult for the theatre company to get the balance between keeping the young people's interest and making them feeling overwhelmed by the expectation and discipline involvement placed upon them. In addition for those in residential units there were times when young people were disturbed at night by other young residents and this meant that they then found it difficult to meet early morning deadlines.

5.2.5 Value of arts for young people

In the following quote a foster father talked about how he felt that engagement in the arts was essential because of the wide range of skills, awareness, confidence and creative development that it afforded them.

I think its vital to employ children within creative arts because one it gives self confidence, two it teaches them things about themselves, awareness of other people and to perform with other people ... Yes it's team working, a team effort, it's a vital skill because it just builds children up, so they have children who are not performing academically ... see what they can fulfil ... Yes it allows a

creative development and it's another part of the model, it is quite physical but not in a sports physical way but it allows you to use your mind and piece things together. You know creative activity is putting things together ... so its piecing all those things together you know and the whole process of working through it and developing it so you become involved with that, you are a part of that. It just helps you grow it is an awareness about yourself and about yourself in line with others. (FC3)

His partner (FC2) agreed suggesting that drama gave young people the opportunity to explore their emotions through characterisation. In particular, she highlighted how through the play, her foster son had for the first time been able to express and articulate the anger he felt about his dad letting him down during contact arrangements.

Chapter Six Following the performances

6.1 After-show events

Immediately after several of the *City of One* performances young people were involved in a number of activities aimed at promoting the learning from the musical or sharing further their experiences of care. On three occasions this involved after show discussions between the cast, audience and panels of senior policy makers. The professionals came from a number of local authorities within the South West region and included three Directors of Children's Services, officers from the Government Office for the South West. Also high profile national policy figures such as Sir Al Aynsley-Green, Children's Commissioner and David Holmes, The Chief Executive for the British Association for Adoption and Fostering.

These discussions allowed the opportunity for participants to share their views and concerns relating to the recent changes outlined in *Care Matters: Time for Change* (DfES, 2007). Young cast members in particular felt that this was an opportunity to have their voices heard and to highlight to influential adults both positive and negative impacts of living in the Care System.

On one evening, cast members with experience of the care system also took part in a post show cabaret during which they performed a number of pieces including dance, poetry and singing. Two examples of this work are included (page 34). All of this work had been written, developed and choreographed by the young people themselves and audiences gave accounts of their powerful, articulate and polished performances.

6.2 Post-show reviews

Audiences commented on young people's levels of confidence and high quality performance abilities in both the main performance and the cabaret. Reviews of *City of One* were extremely positive and commented on the quality of the performance as a whole, as well as the skill and professionalism of individual actors. Several reviews highlighted the production's ability to address the every day realities of the care system with both sensitivity and humour. It is clear that *City of One* was able to impart a lasting impact on its audience, which on several nights constituted a full house.

It had the audience reaching for tissues during the performance, and buzzing about it for days afterwards ... A major strength of the production was in its heartbreaking accuracy in demonstrating the problems faced every day by those involved with children in the care system. (Elspeth Loades, Working Lives)

Myrtle continues to raise the bar for work produced by young casts and cements its reputation for making ground-breaking theatre which moves and affects its audience. (Venue, Bristol and Bath, 14-23 September)

It is rare that a piece of theatre moves, amuses and challenges in equal measure. Myrtle Theatre's 'City of One' manages all three in a seemingly effortless blend of stark realism, modern myth and musical theatre ... This is a really important piece of theatre that should be seen by everyone who has an interest in the lives of our young people. (Peet Cooper, Freelance Performer and Director)



Blossom Beautifully by YP1

I know you feel down right now,
But hold your head high and look around.
There are things better to do than feel sorry
for yourself.

Putting yourself down isn't good for your
health.

Think positively.
And your life will blossom beautifully.

Make the most of what you have available to
you.

Third world countries would think what you
have is too good to be true.

'Although you live in foster care,
You still get to see your parents,
For some children, life isn't that fair.'

So stop being sad,
Life isn't that bad.

Think of the children worse off than you.

Some children just don't have a clue,
About their life, why they're in care.

They may feel like tearing out their hair.

I know you feel that way sometimes,
But trust me, the sun will always shine.

Think positively.
And your life will blossom beautifully.

Dramatical Drama by YP2

Drama is my saviour.
My way to unwind.
I can be anyone I want
I can take on a different mind.

I can do things that aren't possible
It if was plain old me.

I can perform publicly
And let the whole world see.

I can act all droopy,
Miserable and sad.
Or happy, cheery, excited
Or just downright mad.

See, drama is magical
I can act myself to the world
But when I'm on stage in public eye
I see what magic drama holds.

Seven weeks after the performances had finished, Myrtle Theatre Company laid on a follow-up workshop event to which all of the *City of One* cast members were invited. The event took place on a Sunday and was split into two parts in order to accommodate the different ages and abilities of the young people involved. The focus of the event was comedy improvisation and was very well attended by the young cast members.

6.3 Future dissemination activity

During the post show discussions a number of suggestions were made about how *City of One* could be further disseminated. In particular, young cast members decided they would like to take:

"the show to London to perform in front of Government politicians to show how children in care ... are dedicated to sharing their experiences" (YP7)

This they believed they could do through their performance of *City of One* which is based on the principles outlined in *Every Child Matters* (HM Treasury, 2003) and *Care Matters: Time for Change* (DfES, 2007). One young care leaver in particular was determined to make this happen and made a successful application through the Youth Opportunities and Youth Capital funds to support the venture. With significant additional support from Myrtle Theatre Company and the Government Office for the South West, the whole cast will be visiting London in February 2008 to undertake two performances to large influential audiences.

Chapter Seven Discussion and conclusions

7.1 Strengths and limitations of this evaluation

The multi-method design of this evaluation allowed data to be collected from a wide range of different perspectives. This helped to build up a more accurate and comprehensive picture of the impact that this project had, not only on the young people themselves, but also on their carers, theatre staff and members of the audience. Semi-structured interviews allowed respondents to talk about the project in their own words and also provided them with considerable flexibility as to the issues they wanted to discuss. The two-stage interview process allowed researchers to build up a rapport with the young people and this helped to encourage full and frank discussion of relevant issues during follow-up interviews. Verbatim quotations have been presented, where appropriate, in order to illustrate respondents' views.

Unfortunately it was not possible to interview all 14 young people with experience of the care system, as three young male cast members did not consent to be interviewed. However, all 14 cast members were observed and carers' interviews allowed some of the missing young people's views and experiences to be represented. In addition, despite several attempts, it was not possible to carry out a follow-up interview with one young man who withdrew from the production during the rehearsals. It is clear that the evaluation would have benefited from the inclusion of this young man's views and experiences as these may have had an impact on the recommendations made, particularly with regards to support for engagement. Although four foster carers took part in interviews, only one residential worker agreed to take part. As at least two of the young people who subsequently withdrew from the main production were in residential care, it would have been useful to have included further data from residential workers.

7.2 Biographies of the young people

The 14 young cast members highlighted throughout this study had a wide range of experiences and feelings about their relationship with the care system and particularly the professionals they had come into contact with. Some young people had had relatively stable foster placements while others felt they had moved around far more than they would have liked. Most young people interviewed articulated some significant benefits of living within foster care or in care home placements over staying with their families of origin. However, this did not detract from the sadness they articulated at not being able to live with biological parents and siblings. It was inevitable that during the interviews young people would reflect on a number of distressing situations they had been faced with during their lives, this we believe represents more generally the stories of those children within the British care system. The emphasis here was to assess the impact of the role of the arts on young people's lives, we therefore believe that the findings discussed here would resonate with other young people in care.

7.3 General perceptions of *City of One*

Overall the young people who took part in this evaluation were extremely positive about the project. They found it fun and exciting and several spoke about the buzz they experienced when performing in front of a paying audience. In spite of this, the young people also acknowledged that there had been times when they found the rehearsals repetitive and boring.



They did, however, go on to recognise that this level of preparation was in fact necessary in order to produce a high quality, polished production, and that this in turn required commitment and reliability in terms of attendance at rehearsals. The experience as a whole demonstrated that learning could be enjoyable and that children and young people in care could be successful at it. For some, this was counter to their previous experiences of formal learning whilst at school. The project was successful in that it was able to attract a number of young people who had not previously taken part in any professional theatre productions. However it was also able to consolidate and develop the skills and abilities of those who had taken part in previous Myrtle Theatre Company productions.

7.4 Impact on young people of taking part

Consistent with other work in the field, young people and those caring for them highlighted a range of impacts associated with involvement in *City of One*. These included the development of performance, communication and team working skills. In particular respondents highlighted some of the difficulties young people can sometimes face in making and sustaining relationships with peers. Young people and carers commented on how through involvement in the performance young people had developed a heightened awareness of themselves and how this had impacted on their abilities to co-operate and be tolerant of others. Several young people highlighted how they had previously found it difficult to work in groups as disagreements between themselves and others would prevent them continuing with activities. However, this time although there had been disagreements between cast members the strong sense of belonging and commitment within the cast generated by the adult professionals combined with support and advice on how to reach conflict resolution meant almost without exception young people stayed involved in the project. Friendships and social connectedness were key impacts of the project. Respondents talked about how young people who were previously resistant to taking risks in new situations or found it difficult to make friends felt a strong sense of engagement and friendship with other cast members during the project. Many commented that their involvement had allowed them the opportunity of becoming friends with young people they would have not have become friends

with in other social situations. In many ways having a mixed cast had broken down the stereotypes and perceptions young people may have held, especially in terms of feeling valued rather than stigmatised for their care experiences.

Gains in confidence associated with being involved with a high quality performance with professional performers were collectively articulated, as a strong sense of pride was felt by both performers and carers. All those involved felt that they were more competent and confident performers or production members. For example two boys who had initially felt very self conscious and had struggled to learn the dance routines felt pleased with what they had achieved. Those involved had become increasingly enthusiastic, motivated and aspirational in terms of their continued involvement in the arts. Claims are often made about the transformatory nature of young people's involvements in the arts (Arts Council England, 2003 a, b) in this project two young women expressed this view explicitly. The young women suggested that during the project they had been less involved in risk taking behaviours and that their attitudes to learning had transformed. This had heightened their sense of purpose and optimism about opportunities for the future, particularly around arts involvement.

7.5 Learning about experiences of care

As previously highlighted Theatre In Education (TIE) historically has been associated with teaching around sensitive subjects (Denman et al., 1995; Day 2002; Orme & Salmon 2002; Orme et al., 2007). Learning about the experiences of care was seen as an important impact of involvement. Cast members felt strongly that their views and experiences of care had been listened to and valued, not least by professional performers, who were able to utilise this information to improve their characterisations. The performance itself was seen as an important opportunity to communicate to large audiences including influential adults and their peers, as significant numbers of school parties had attended and taken part in post show discussions. Moreover, those involved talked about how they identified with the characters and that the performance had allowed them to understand how their behaviour may have impacted on others, particularly foster carers and their families. Carers on the other hand highlighted how involvement had acted as a vehicle for discussion and had moved young people on emotionally in relation to coming to

terms with their care experiences allowing for life story work. Since the development of the Healthy Care Programme (DfES, 2005) there have been an increasing number of creative projects exploring the impact of this type of work. However, the profile of arts based initiatives remains relatively hidden and under researched. Lack of rigorous evidence can make it difficult for projects to secure funding to extend this work and the associated benefits.

7.6 Factors affecting involvement

There were a significant number of factors identified that had both a negative and positive impact on young cast members' capacity to stay involved during the performance period. Young people and their carers were enthusiastic about the fact that the project was not solely aimed at young people with experience of the care system, and felt that the mixed nature of the cast had encouraged involvement. Clearly where foster and residential carers played a proactive role in encouraging, preparing and supporting young people's involvement, success was much more likely. This included undertaking practical tasks such as providing lifts to rehearsals, help with learning lines and encouragement when young people found things difficult or were becoming distracted. Equally important was carers attending performances and giving feedback. Where young people lived in residential homes with numerous workers it was more difficult to maintain consistent communication between the theatre company and the units. This meant young people did not always get consistent messages about the importance of their involvement and their need for on going commitment. During initial involvement it appeared that if young people knew someone else in the cast it helped them gain the confidence to keep attending, though friendships grew very quickly due to the intensity of the rehearsal schedule.

Some young people did need a significant amount of financial help to maintain their involvement, mainly around travel expenses and occasionally lunch monies. Without this support, young people would not have been able to attend rehearsals or get home safely in the evenings. There was no doubt that when young people found things difficult, were having a bad day or just finding it difficult to concentrate, having adults around to talk to, mediate disputes or keep them on task, helped enormously. Flexibility within the Theatre Company meant

that five young people, including two of those who withdrew from *City of One* during rehearsals, were supported by a theatre practitioner to create an alternative shorter piece of theatre; *City of Ten*, which they performed after a Saturday afternoon matinee.

Negative impacts on young people's involvement included issues that were happening at home or away from the performance space. One young woman in particular sometimes found it difficult to attend. Disruption by residents in the care home she lived in meant that she was often too tired to take part in rehearsals. The intensity and the pace of the rehearsal schedule was also sometimes cited as an issue, particularly when the performances clashed with the start of term and increasing demands from school and college. This was articulated as a significant issue for one young woman who left the production just before the second week of performances. In future, where there are a significant number of performances, more consideration may need to be given to timing. This said, there were two casts performing on alternate nights so cast members were able to catch up on home work and sleep.

7.7 Recommendations

7.7.1 For local authorities

- Local authorities in collaboration with others should actively seek to develop performing arts and creative opportunities for children and young people in their care. The provision of additional financial support for youth based arts projects is crucial to meet the needs of children in care and support their successful engagement. As demonstrated in this project, additional resources may also be needed to support young people who are not able to maintain their involvement at the level required.
- The Healthy Care Programme was cited in *Care Matters: Time for Change* (Department for Education and Skills, 2007) as providing a strategic partnership framework for building sustainable activity to promote the health and well being of 'looked after' children, involving creative arts. However, lack of available good quality evidence to underpin the impact of arts based work can make it difficult for projects to secure funding to extend their work and the associated benefits. It is therefore important, that when possible the local authority raises the profile of projects and their impacts

through evaluation reports such as this to a wide range of audiences.

- Learning from this project could be further disseminated to other Local Authorities Children and Young People's Services, Primary Care Trusts and the voluntary sectors through a range of mediums including networks, newsletters, academic and professional orientated conferences and publications.
- Carers including those from social work, residential care and foster care need explicit information and training about the benefits of arts based involvement for children and young people. This needs to include practical advice about how to prepare and support young people in their involvement. Where appropriate, trained carers and professionals also need to consider the possibility of initiating life story work.

7.7.2 For policy makers

- Arts Council England and the Children's Workforce Development Council should consider the opportunities for well being and development offered to children in care through their involvement in arts based projects. This raises implications for the selection and training of artists who are working with vulnerable children and young people, including those in care.
- Provision of performing arts opportunities for vulnerable young people should form part of a cross governmental strategy to promote well being using the arts. High profile 'one off' projects such as *City of One* should be viewed as part of the strategy that Local Authorities promote as corporate parents alongside smaller-scale community-based arts opportunities.

7.7.3 For arts organisations

- The specific and collective needs of young people in care and the implications for support, needs detailed assessment during the planning phase of the project. This may have implications for the balance of the cast between those needing additional support and those young people who are emotionally able to give support to their fellow cast members.
- Where possible projects should be collaborations between the statutory, voluntary and arts sectors to support the

successful participation of young people in creative arts projects. Building on work undertaken through the Arts Council and National Children's Bureau (NCB) around arts partnerships and networks, it is essential that good practice is shared locally, regionally and nationally.

- It is essential that companies/projects consider issues of sustainability. If young people are motivated to take part they need clear opportunities to further improve their skills and move on their performance aspirations at the end of projects or performances.
- There is a significant amount of mentoring and high level of emotional demand placed on those individuals managing projects that involve vulnerable young people. It is therefore important that projects identify the opportunity for those taking a leadership role to access peer based supervision for support, critical reflection and professional development.

7.7.4 For theatre companies

- Clear project objectives need to be agreed at the outset. Young people appreciate and are motivated by being part of performances that are of high quality and are primarily interested in the drama/performance element. Sharing care experiences may be an outcome but should not be a requirement.
- Recruitment of a young cast should include mechanisms that actively seek out and encourage young people with experiences of care to take part. However, young people like to feel that they are recruited on their own artistic merit as part of the cast or production team, and not solely because they are children and young people in care. In addition, consideration needs to be given to ensure that young people in care are not identifiable from publicity materials without gaining prior consent.
- Prior to recruitment of a young cast, realistic consideration needs to be given to the capacity of the company or project to meet the needs of the young people involved, in particular those cast members with additional needs, such as children and young people who are disabled or in care. All members of the production team need to be appropriately trained and able to respond effectively using strategies that support young people's involvement in the project.

- Timing of rehearsals needs to be carefully considered when there are significant numbers of performances to ensure that young people's other commitments can be equally well managed.

7.7.5 For researchers in the field

- There is increasing pressure on policy makers and practitioners in arts based initiatives to provide evidence on the effectiveness of interventions such as *City of One*. Key to this process is the funding of comprehensive mixed methods evaluations that can establish the ingredients necessary to ensure the successful participation of young people in care. In addition researchers should establish not only the immediate but also the longer term outcomes for children and young people and how participation in the arts is sustained over time.
- The successful piloting of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (NHS Health Scotland et al., 2006) highlights that this could be an accessible and effective scale in assessing changes in perceptions of well-being in larger populations of children and young people in care. Should the opportunity arise we would recommend further exploration of this tool.
- Further evaluation methods need to be explored to ensure that those young people and carers who do not give consent to be interviewed can be involved in project evaluations in other ways.

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Appendices

- 1 **Observation Criteria**
- 2 **Interview schedule for young people prior to rehearsals**
- 3 **Interview schedule for young people following the performances**
- 4 **Interview schedule - Myrtle Theatre Company**
- 5 **Interview schedule for foster carers and residential workers**

Appendix 1 Observation Criteria

- What role did the practitioners take?
- The structure of the session
- The content of the session
- The actors' ability to work with the young people
- The appropriateness of the session (i.e. was it pitched at the right level)
- The quality of the work produced by the young people
- Anything that could have been done differently
- The level of engagement of young people
- The nature of disruptions e.g. young people leaving for any reason, talking, shouting, physical disturbances
- Did young people look comfortable, enthusiastic, fearful etc in their new acting role?
- How were the young people reacting to others around them?
- What sorts of emotions were being expressed, e.g. fun/happiness/anger/fear
- How did young people appear at the end of the session? Did young people express any views about how the rehearsal/performance had gone? What was the observed impact on the young people?
- Any other comments

Appendix 2 Interview schedule for young people prior to rehearsals

- 1 Have you ever been involved in anything like this before? Prompt trying to get at how things may have gone in the past. So how did that go? What did you like/not like? What did you feel you got of out it? What made it difficult/easy to be involved in ... ?
- 2 How did you become involved in City of One performance and the work with Myrtle Theatre Company?
- 3 How do you feel about getting involved? Prompts: fears and opportunities, get at issues of confidence and skills
- 4 What sorts of things do you think might help you stay enthusiastic and involved? Do you usually finish things you start?
- 5 What are you hoping to get out of your involvement with the performance?
- 6 Part of this performance project is about seeing how drama and performance makes you feel about yourself/your well-being, would you mind if we take five minutes to fill in this short survey, then I will ask you the same questions again at the end of the project?
- 7 Is there anything else you would like to tell me? Thank you, explain what will happen next

Appendix 3 Interview schedule for young people following the performances

- 1 First of all can I just check how long you stayed involved in the project? (If not long explore reasons why)
- 2 I'd like you to think about the run-up to the performances.
 - What did you think about the way the rehearsals were organised? (content, structure, duration)
 - Did you enjoy them?
 - Do you think that 2 ½ weeks was enough preparation time?
 - How did you get on with the other cast members (young people and professionals)?
 - Did you find it easy/difficult to learn your lines/moves?
 - Do you feel that you were able to bring your own personal experiences of the care system to the play?
- 3 Thinking about the performances now, how did you feel when you were performing in front of a paying audience? (Prompts: fears and opportunities, get at issues of confidence and skills)
- 4 Is there anything that made it easy/difficult for you to be involved in *City of One*? (e.g. location, travel arrangements/costs, friends/family, prior experience)
- 5 What helped/would have helped you stay enthusiastic and involved? (e.g. encouragement from staff/fellow cast members/friends & family)
- 6 What do you think you've got out of your involvement in *City of One*? (e.g. skills, confidence, friendship)
- 7 How do you feel now that the project and performances are over? (e.g. disappointed, relieved, sad, looking forward to doing something similar in the future)
- 8 Part of this performance project is about seeing how drama and performance makes you feel about yourself/your well-being. You may remember that we filled in this short survey when we last met, would you mind if we take five minutes to complete it again now?
- 9 Is there anything else you would like to tell me? Thank you.

Appendix 4 Interview schedule – Myrtle Theatre Company

- 1 How are you feeling now that the performances are over?
- 2 What do you think were the main challenges that you faced during this project?
 - choice of young people
 - scale
 - time allowed
 - number of adults involved
 - support from outside agencies
 - other
- 3 What do you think the young people got out of their involvement?
 - short-term
 - long-term
- 4 Did you feel supported during the project? If so, how and by whom?
- 5 What sort of feedback/reaction have you had?
 - audiences
 - foster carers
 - workers
 - young people
- 6 Could you tell me a bit about the work that Angie did with the young people who dropped out?
- 7 If you were doing it again is there anything you would do differently?
- 8 Is there anything else you would like to say?

Appendix 5 Interview schedule for foster carers and residential workers

- 1 Has your son/daughter ever been involved in anything like this before? If so how did that go? What do you think he/she liked/disliked about the experience? What do you feel he/she got out of it?
- 2 What do you think your son/daughter has got out of his/her involvement in the City of One project and performance? What do you think he/she liked/disliked about it?
- 3 What do you think the value of the arts is for young people?
- 4 What do you think the impact of your son/daughter's involvement has been? e.g. on key skills and on health and well being.
- 5 What do you think the strengths and weaknesses of the City of One project are?
- 6 Is there anything else that you would like to say?

