

MED Theatre

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MED Theatre
Inspired by Dartmoor

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“What sets MED Theatre apart is how they work at a very local level and invest in a community over time, rather than a one off experience.”

~ Ali Hirst, former Princetown Headteacher

Introduction

MED Theatre is a developmental community theatre organisation. We create cultural opportunities in to help communities and individuals develop in the rural hinterland of Devon. We use the term developmental to describe our work because of the co-creative, responsive methods we practise, inviting communities to contribute and perform in our original dramas as a means of exploring their personal experiences.

We facilitate opportunities for young people, emerging artists and freelance professionals, as well as older members of the community, by providing a platform on which they can all work together creatively and learn from one another. We are inspired by the rural environment of Devon, and the people who live there. We strive to inspire them to contribute to the debate on issues of our time and encourage them to bring their experience of rural life, and their relationship to the natural world, to the fore.

With a track record in drama, literature, dance, music, audio, film and puppetry, informed by in-depth research and assisted by experts, our work tackles the interface between the human and non-human through a post-humanist lens.

It is our belief that championing the rights of the non-human as a tool to provoke thought and increase empathy is essential if we are to contribute to understanding the root causes of the biodiversity and climate crises that face us over the next decade.

We recognise that a lack of education and poverty contribute to inimical behaviours regarding the environment and sustainability. Through our young people's groups, education programmes and creative projects, we combine education and creativity to deepen empathy, bringing the human and the non-human together.

The nurture and support of our community members' mental health plays a significant role in the interactions we have with them. We provide pastoral support and mentoring outside of weekly groups and rehearsals, to offer a place for community members to talk or simply just be in a safe space. Our safeguarding and child protection policy is assessed annually and all staff receive training to deal with issues sensitively and appropriately as they arise.

In the coming years we aim to become the key performing arts provider in rural South West England, linking Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks and working with remote rural settlements to provide creative opportunities to tackle rural disadvantage and raise environmental awareness.

The dissemination of our work across Devon and the UK is crucial to this and we will endeavour to explore ways of sharing our work and methodology more widely, including internationally, whilst also building relationships with artistic and environmental partners.

MED Theatre's approach to working with communities has been written about in 'Histories of Cultural Participation, Values and Governance' edited by Eleonora Belfiore and Lianne Gibson (Macmillan Palgrave 2019). Our work has also been featured on BBC R4 and BBC 2 TV.

Executive Summary

A brief history:

Over the past 30 years MED Theatre has established itself as a producer of original rural drama that platforms the experiences of local residents. Since 1990 MED Theatre has been providing opportunities for young people and with investment from Futurebuilders England in 2006 set up its extensive education programme. For the last eight years we have been supported by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Over the next five years we want to build on this success and become the key performing arts provider in rural Devon, delivering work across rural settlements and influencing practice beyond Devon.

Our work is rooted in:

The ecology, history and folklore of Dartmoor and other rural and/or isolated areas of South West England. We recognise the importance of this local focus for our participants and audiences and will continue to provide and expand our pool of creative opportunities. By strengthening our relationships with other arts organisations in particular, we hope to curate a richer cultural landscape for the communities we work with.

We aim to be:

A resilient, forward-thinking company that places the creative development and mental health of our community members and staff at the centre of what we do.

We plan to build on:

- Our relationship with Dartmoor and Exmoor National Park to further disseminate our work.
- The accessibility of our work, developing our work to suit early years and differently abled participants and audiences.
- Our professionally led work by developing an Associate Artist scheme and investing more into our platform for emerging artists.
- The integration of digital aspects into our artistic programme, enabling more people to engage with our work and improving the efficacy of our marketing strategy.
- International and national relationships with other cultural organisations.

We will deliver annually:

- A large scale community play created with and for the rural communities of Dartmoor National Park
- Training and Learning opportunities for rurally isolated young people and South West artists
- Summer tours of small scale professional work across Devon with a focus on Exmoor and Dartmoor National Parks

Vision, Mission & Approach

MED Theatre's Vision is...

- To create performing art inspired by local ecology, social issues, history and folklore, whilst exploring the human-natural world interface in a post-humanist context.
- To build a stronger more creatively connected community and reduce social isolation by bringing young and old together through our multi-generational performances.
- To deliver wide-reaching work that stimulates exploration of the root causes of the biodiversity and climate crises, through our tradition of championing the rights of the non-human.
- To empower young people to find their voice, increase their self-confidence and connect with others of all ages through our creative programmes.
- To support young people to work towards and integrate positive mental health attitudes, by giving them a sense of belonging and worth through our creative opportunities, and individual pastoral care as required. We recognise the importance of positive early intervention.

MED Theatre's Mission is...

- To be recognised as one of the leading rurally-based community theatre companies in the UK.
- To further increase our local reach working with young people across the rural hinterlands of Dartmoor and Exmoor, both in and out of schools.
- To disseminate our model across the UK, through digital seminars and conferences.

MED Theatre's Approach is...

- To work in a spirit of equality with every team member and participant being valued for their unique contribution.
- To create open access opportunities that bring people together to create meaningful projects connected to their locality.
- To encourage leadership in young people and collaboration between the generations.
- To conduct regular evaluative practices that involve our participants to drive forward the direction of our work.

“MED Theatre helps people feel it is good to be creative, to speak out, to be confident in their opinions, that they matter, that they can be individual, and importantly that they are

valued”
~ Parent



What We Do

At a glance...

- Weekly and bi-weekly young people's groups in Dartmoor and North Devon
- Work with schools and universities
- Community plays
- Experimental and site-specific work
- Music composition & mentorship
- In-depth research projects
- Support emerging artists
- Work with environmental and cultural partners



Young People...

We work regularly with 70-90 young people across our weekly and bi-weekly groups. Often we will nurture our young people through the early years groups right up until they are adults. This means that we have a very strong relationship with them and have an extended chance to understand their interests and the struggles they might be facing. We operate an open door policy, encouraging our young people to come and chat with us if they are struggling or needing some extra support.

In short...

MED Theatre's artistic programme reflects our mission to ensure that all members of our community have the opportunity to engage with free high quality arts provision, that is rooted in the creative interpretation of their rural location. We combine dance, drama, writing, music, film and radio with continuous research to inspire and invigorate our participants and audiences.

Education...

The majority of our education work takes place in primary and secondary schools and we have a strong relationship with the schools across Dartmoor and rural Devon that we work with regularly. We have a range of workshops on offer, from single sessions to week-long residencies. Our work with Plymouth University and the University of Exeter continues to grow, and we have recently begun to be invited to give workshops further afield in Bristol, London and Newcastle.

Community Plays...

MED Theatre has been producing community plays since 1980 and continues to tour them to local village halls, schools and other spaces, rejuvenating community spaces, with the aim of bringing culture into communities that otherwise might not have the opportunity to experience it. These productions are the foundation that MED Theatre was built on - the interaction and play between the generations. Over the years MED Theatre's plays have included anyone from 8 - 80 years old.



Dance-Dramas & Site Specific Work...

MED Theatre champions the creation of work centred around the natural terrain of Dartmoor and Devon, whether that be physically outside or bringing the outside into community spaces. Since 2010 MED Theatre has used the dance-drama form, incorporating live music and poetry as a way of storytelling that combines body with mind and evokes the sensations of the natural world. Often these pieces are created through a mentoring process with young emerging artists in collaboration with professional artists.

Research...

MED Theatre uses the ecology, sociology, history, myth and folklore of Dartmoor and Devon to inspire original drama. This research underpins our mission to cultivate a greater understanding of the past, present and future of the local landscape and what this means for human and non-human relationships. Our young people co-research alongside the MED Theatre team and professional historians, environmentalists and archaeologists, as well as freelance artists.



Original Music & Mentorship...

Since 1990 MED Theatre has nurtured the development of young musicians and woven original music into all aspects of the artistic programme. Gillian Webster, our in-house composer, has led and supported numerous music projects, and provided original scores for many MED Theatre productions, as well as mentoring young people to produce incidental music. Music is an integral part of our story-telling practice, and we have helped develop young musicians who have gone on to work for companies such as Complicité.



Finance

Financial Model:

MED Theatre has always relied on grant funding for its development as a major provider in rural Devon. This reliance will take a considerable length of time to resolve, in line with other arts organisations, and therefore MED Theatre continues to seek out grant funders who can provide the basic revenue income to support MED Theatre's staff payroll and other artistic expenditure. Nevertheless, alongside grants we do generate a significant amount of earned income, and we aim to increase this in our turnover during the coming years.

“MED Theatre markedly underlines the act of ‘theatre-going’ in places where traditional theatre spaces do not exist and where the social, cultural, and geo-political contexts of non-traditional theatre spaces bleed into the performance making process.”

~ Professor Kerrie Schaefer, University of Exeter

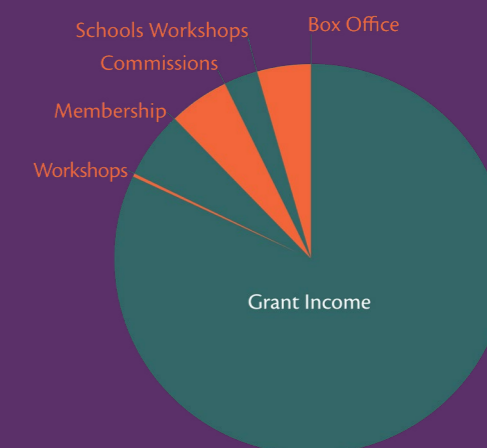
Earned income streams:

- Box Office from touring productions, including large-scale community plays and short professional or semi-professional plays
- Commissions for community engagement projects including productions, workshops and other activities
- Education and engagement workshops in and out of schools
- Training and development courses for artists and young people, including summer schools and specialist residentials.
- Public community events, such as our annual Traditional Festive Revel (ceilidh dance) open to all
- Sales of merchandise and published play scripts

Other income streams:

- Grants to support core costs
- Project grants, supporting the delivery of specific work
- Friends and Members schemes
- Public and benefactor donations

Current Average Income:



Mitigating Risks

Financial:

1. We will annually review our funding strategy, carrying out evaluation into the processes, types of funders we apply to and the organisation of our existing funding strategy.
2. Our Company Development Director will attend regular funding training and seminars and disseminate this learning across the team, through internal up-skilling sessions.
3. We will trial a period of in-kind funding support & advice with external artists/companies to research and reflect upon how our applications come across to external funders.
4. We will explore and establish other avenues for earned income streams, for example developing our in-house workshop programme and expanding our current Friends and Members Scheme, sales of merchandise, and conferences led by MED Theatre.

Prolonged Staff Illness:

1. We will implement the option of hybrid working, where appropriate and feasible, to enable staff to work flexibly from home to manage their mental and physical health requirements.
2. We will engage in regular skills sharing between team members to ensure that multiple staff members have a basic understanding of specific areas of the organisation.
3. We will create a flexible procedure to put in place should a staff member require a prolonged amount of time off work.
4. We will consult with the Board of Directors as to which members might be able to volunteer their time to assist with the transition to a team of fewer staff.
5. If necessary we will recruit a new member of staff on a fixed term contract to cover the period.

Loss of Premises:

1. We will continue to stay abreast of other possible venue options for the organisation locally and conduct a thorough evaluation with the board and stakeholders, should a larger premises become available.
2. We will continue to maintain the health of our existing building, using professional traders to fix and repair any damage, to reduce risk of fire or flood.
3. We will maintain a strong relationship with our landlord and ensure any conversations of termination of our lease either by the landlord or the organisation are handled appropriately.

Global Disasters:

1. We will ensure that the organisation has a procedure for working within the constraints of a pandemic or other global or national disaster (for example Foot and Mouth) which causes major disruption to Devon.
2. We will implement a programme of online delivery utilising video software to continue to work with our community.
3. We will adapt and update our working procedures in accordance with the government guidance at the time.

Loss of Rural/Local Facilities:

1. We will continue to support and recommend the local businesses and individuals that we work with.
2. We will continue to use local community spaces for our workshops and community plays to invest in these as cultural hubs.
3. We will ensure that we implement systems to ensure payments in and out can be made on time despite the loss of our two local banks.



“She has blossomed! As parents it was great to see how the different stages developed and how the young people encapsulated their fears, joys and excitement into producing some great young original theatre.”

~ Parent



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MED Theatre
Inspired by Dartmoor

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