

Evidencing the Long-Term Impact of Participation in Youth Theatre

A Multiple-Case Study



Youth
Theatre
Arts
Scotland

SCOTTISH GRADUATE SCHOOL FOR ARTS & HUMANITIES

Sgoil Ceumnachaidh na h-Alba airson Ealain agus Daonnachdan

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Evidencing the Long-Term Impact of Participation in Youth Theatre: A Multiple-Case Study

This multiple-case study is the product of a collaboration between **Youth Theatre Arts Scotland** (YTAS) and the **Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities** (SGSAH). It aims to evidence the long-term impacts of participation in youth theatre on participants' professional and personal lives in Scotland.

This multiple-case study thus aims to supplement the information currently available to the youth theatre arts sector in Scotland. Several existing studies evidence the short- to mid-term impacts of participation in the arts on young people across Scotland, the UK, and Europe, and indicate how they might best be achieved¹. These impacts, along with the notion that they extend into later life, are generally accepted by sector stakeholders, policymakers, and funders. Indeed, they form the basis of Scotland's current Youth Arts Strategy, *Time to Shine*:

"We know that immersion in cultural activity can help bolster the future resilience and well-being of communities and individuals and nowhere is this more important than in our children and young people."

Fiona Hyslop, (former) Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs²

It is in the context of these existing studies and Scotland's Youth Arts Strategy, then, that this multiple-case study aims to indicate more precisely what that 'future resilience and well-being' might look like for a number of different people, specifically with regards to participation in youth theatre. The resultant findings may then be used by youth theatre organisations for the future planning and delivery of youth

theatre arts activity, by intermediary bodies such as YTAS for the encouragement of funding and support, and by researchers as a basis and justification for further research.

These aims can be further summarised by the following research questions:

- What are some of the long-term impacts of participation in youth theatre on participants' professional lives? i.e., on participants' skills development, career progression, and approach to work?
- What are some of the long-term impacts of participation in youth theatre on participants' personal lives? i.e., on participants' wellbeing, socialisation, and values or beliefs?
- What can we infer from the similarities and differences between the long-term impacts reported by participants?

The methodology for this study comprised a web survey followed by case study interviews. The web survey was completed by 346 individuals who had previously participated in youth theatre activities in Scotland, the findings from which were used to select a diverse range of individuals for the case study stage. Semi-structured depth interviews were then carried out with ten shortlisted individuals, and ultimately eight of these were selected to be the final case study subjects as included within the report that follows.

It is worth noting that, as a multiple-case study, this research does not aim to produce a holistic overview of the long-term impacts of participation in youth theatre across Scotland. That is to say, it does not attempt a quantitative analysis of a representative sample for the purpose of generalisation across the sector. This is partly because gathering a truly representative sample would not be possible within the time and resource confines of this study, but also because it is the opinion of YTAS that the study's aims are best met by the collection and evaluation of qualitative as opposed to quantitative evidence.

This multiple-case study thus offers evidence relating specifically to a number of discrete individuals and extrapolates from the similarities and differences between the cases a range of insights into some – but not all – of the precise ways in which a person might be impacted in the long-term by their participation in youth theatre.

Further explanation of this study's methodology can be found in the Appendix, but it suffices to state here that the eight case studies which follow do not pretend to constitute a representative sample of all former youth theatre participants in Scotland. Rather, they seek to evidence in detail some of the specific hows and whys of a fact which has long been recognised by sector stakeholders, policymakers, and funders – which is that youth theatre changes lives.

Ellie Mitchell
YTAS's SGSAH-funded Research Intern
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¹ See, for instance: Action for Children's Arts, *Arts Backpack: A Feasibility Study* (2019) <<https://www.childrensarts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Arts-BackPack-Feasibility-Study-FINAL-compressed-1-1.pdf>>; Creative Scotland, *How do you draw a rainbow the wrong way? – Understanding young people's development in creative activities* (2017) <<https://www.bop.co.uk/reports/understanding-young-people-development-in-creative-activities>>; and Research Scotland, *Face-to-Face Expressive Arts in Scotland During COVID-19* (2021) <<https://user-nwydzmx.cld.bz/Safe-Face-to-Face-Working-During-Covid-19-by-Cultural-Practitioners/2/>>.

² Creative Scotland, *Time to Shine: Scotland's Youth Arts Strategy for Ages 0-25* (2013) <https://www.creativescotland.com/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/21328/Time-To-Shine-Scotlands-Youth-Arts-Strategy.pdf>, p. 5.

Case Study #1: Alex



Alex (47) is a **Software Engineer**. After 30 years of industry experience, he now leads the Quality Engineering Community of over 600 people at his company, a role which involves responsibility for the direction and vision of the team, creation of events and training courses, and development of learning and collaboration opportunities. At the very beginning of his career, however, Alex attended **West Lothian Youth Theatre** (now Firefly Arts) for four years. He attributes much of his professional success to those years of youth theatre in his early 20s.

“The youth theatre gave me a lot of confidence. I always say in spades [...] My career wouldn’t be what it is today, and I certainly wouldn’t be in the role I’m doing today, if it wasn’t for that confidence.”

Alex attributes his confidence to the “safe space” which youth theatre provided him as a young person to express himself fully, to explore differences and difficulties, and to be “one hundred percent” himself. In addition to this confidence, Alex also attributes his “incredible emotional intelligence” (in the words of a former line manager) to his youth theatre experiences. He refers to his ability to empathise with others, to read tone and body language, and to infer his role in any given situation as “all stuff that I learned through youth theatre”. When explaining the software engineering context in which he works, he emphasises the extent to which this emotional intelligence has influenced his career progression and direction:

“To really become a leader in my area, to become the kind of person that drives and helps build groups and communities and talents, you need to be good at that emotional intelligence, you need to understand how people work, and I think I had a leg-up before everybody else, you know? I know people that are studying it now at work [...] and I’m like: well, that’s all second nature to me. That’s what youth theatre has given me.”

For Alex, youth theatre made a difference at a critical time in his life. When he began his degree in software engineering, he also began work as a trainee software engineer, but in his free time there was little to do as a young person in Livingston. In his own words, “there wasn’t a lot going on [...] It was like a lot of aimless kind of wandering about the streets looking to see if we could get into any trouble.”

When a friend invited Alex to West Lothian Youth Theatre, he hadn’t realised it even existed, but immediately found a community of people with whom he could be himself. He recalls finding a group of people who were all creative in various ways, who all differed from the norm in various ways, and who were all looking for various outlets for expression:

“I found my niche [...] We were all, what’s the word... Windswept and interesting. I’ll borrow Billy Connolly’s saying: windswept and interesting. We were all a bit different.”

“Very fondly”, Alex recalls the family environment created by the leaders. He remembers them always ensuring that everybody had something to do, even if they didn’t feel like acting, and the autonomy they granted the group. He remembers they offered “less teaching and more guidance”, often asking: “What do you want to do? How do you want to explore this?”

The result, Alex says, was that youth theatre became a “safe space” in which “to express ourselves in ways that we’d never had before”. He recalls feeling no pressure to conform, no need to manage internal

politics or others' egos, and the sense that *"nothing was taboo"*. He remembers the ways in which difficult topics would be worked through, so that he never went home feeling that anything had been left unresolved:

"It was [...] I suppose a bit like what I imagine therapy would be like".

As well as regular workshops and local productions, Alex remembers gaining a lot of his confidence and emotional intelligence from the tour opportunities which his youth theatre offered. They took a production of John Binnie's *Soft Boy* to the International Festival in Edinburgh in 2000, performing for several nights at the Stand Comedy Club. The following year, they toured the show to the Tron Theatre in Glasgow and the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, where a reviewer from *The Herald* said they *"performed radiantly"*.

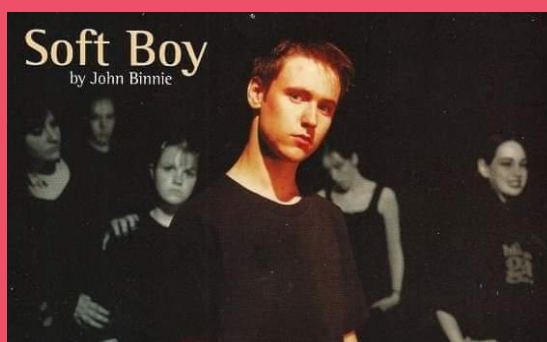
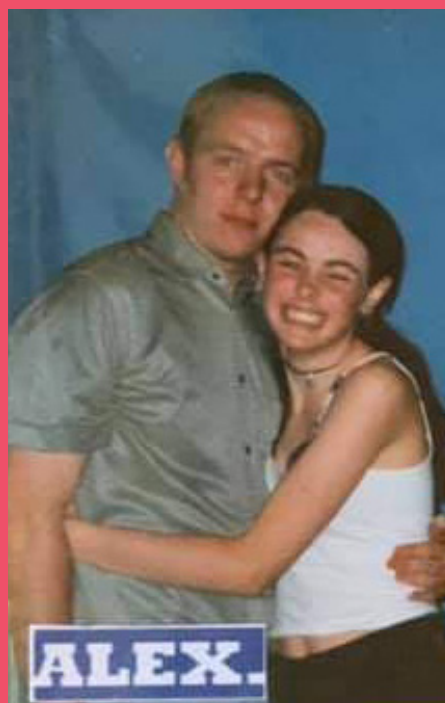
However, Alex's standout memories from these tours are not of the performances, but of behind-the-scenes camaraderie, compassion, and comfort in the face of stress or fatigue or difficulty:

"Youth theatre always taught you to be kind, you know? [...] That for me is one of the key values that I've taken from my experience in youth theatre."

Alex believes that it is this emphasis on the importance of kindness which led to him founding a mindfulness and meditation community at his company four years ago. The community is a colleague-led initiative which now has over 2,500 members. As the founder and lead ambassador, Alex has developed and delivered over 150 sessions on mindfulness and meditation to over 9,000 colleagues, and has also organised several masterclasses on other human-centred skills. Of all of his achievements, he says this is one of the things of which he is most proud.

Outside of work, Alex still acts, directs, and produces for amateur dramatic groups, and he expresses gratitude to his youth theatre experiences for opening up this opportunity for continued creative expression. He has also encouraged his sons to attend youth theatre in the belief that it offers a vital creative outlet which cannot be found at school or at home. He hopes that they will benefit from this as much as he has.

"I wouldn't be the person that I am today if it wasn't for youth theatre."



Case Study #2: Ruth



Ruth (33) is a **Doctor** working in Palliative Medicine, a field of medical care which focuses on improving quality of life for patients and families facing terminal illness. This involves the prevention and relief not only of physical suffering, but also psychological, psychosocial, and spiritual suffering. Ruth was inspired to pursue medicine as a teenager by the US medical drama *ER*, but she also attended **First Bite Youth Theatre** in Edinburgh from the ages of 6 to 18. She has since drawn on many of the skills and values which she learnt during her time there when encountering challenges in the course of her medical training and career:

“I think having that grounding in drama actually really helped me, especially in communication skills [...] I had been taught how to listen to other people, and how to react to body language, or react to what was going on around me.”

Ruth jokes that she soon discovered that being a doctor wasn't at all like *ER*, but she has found that “a lot of being a doctor is acting”. At medical school, she found the simulated interview or scenario exams easier than others, as they were essentially acting or improvisation exercises. This has carried through to her work in palliative medicine, where she says she feels especially able to act in or react to any situation because of the communication skills which she developed in youth theatre. She especially credits youth theatre with her ability to practice active listening and to infer more intuitively a patient's needs from what they say:

“What has really helped me is learning to listen, because [in youth theatre] you had to pay attention to what was going on around you. You couldn't only be thinking about yourself in any particular situation [...] So I think I've always found it quite easy to understand or to listen to patients. I've always been quite surprised by when you listen to a patient and they tell you something which actually probably would have helped some time ago, but for whatever reason [...] there's been some kind of miscommunication.”

For Ruth, these skills are second nature, and she attributes them principally to the safe, open, and equitable environment which her youth theatre leader created at First Bite.

Ruth remembers herself initially as “quite an annoying and precocious child”. She recalls being “pretty confident”, but suspects in hindsight that she was also quite an anxious child. She would ask a lot of questions, and liked to feel that she was getting things “right”. At youth theatre, though, she found “a different space where you could just be who you wanted to be”. Crucial to this was an emphasis on games and on play:

“I think particularly when you're a teenager [...] there's probably not that many opportunities to just play a silly game, and be allowed to look silly and to be foolish, and I think that's what [my youth theatre leader] encouraged. I think that was immensely helpful as a teenager, because you could see that nothing's going to go wrong if you look silly, and also it makes you feel better. There's a release, a kind of joy.”

This emphasis on play was at the heart of Ruth's youth theatre experience, and helped her to feel that her youth theatre was a “safe space” for expression. She recalls there being “a very strong element

of trust within the group”, and also credits her leader for consistently creating and maintaining a level playing field among the socioeconomically diverse group. She was “very skilled at encouraging participation from everyone”, and this sometimes involved ensuring louder participants (like Ruth!) to allow others the space to contribute.

In addition to this freeing focus on games and on playing, Ruth remembers relishing the opportunity to be involved in the production side of shows. She particularly loved making props and the creative challenge of engineering, for instance, “a cot with a false bottom”. As she grew older and felt more self-conscious about performing, she was glad to be able to participate more behind-the-scenes. She recalls that there were stresses associated with the production side of shows, particularly in relation to the pressure to sell tickets.

However, she compares these favourably with the more emotional stresses of her other extra-curricular activities. She remembers the challenges of youth theatre providing a “release” from, rather than a catalyst for, the difficulties of teenage life.

“It didn’t feel like an existential crisis, which most of being a teenager is. It was more like: this is a solid thing we can focus on and then complete.”

Ruth largely attributes this to the still enduring emphasis on play at her youth theatre, even in the later years, and she often refers back to this value when facing difficulties in adult life:

“I find that the thing that I constantly want to go back to is that sense of fun.”

In particular, when her medical training became “emotionally very hard”, Ruth found herself drawing on her youth theatre experiences to help her “build resilience”. She recalls going back to her youth theatre group’s “focus on having fun”, and to the importance which youth theatre placed on teamwork, clear goals, and investment in the process of achieving them. Alongside her skills in communication, these values help her in her day-to-day work.

Ruth remembers her 12 years of youth theatre fondly, and wishes she still had a similar outlet in her adult life for fun, silliness, and play. This has been difficult to find or create amidst a somewhat “all-consuming” career, but she finds it “helpful to have those memories and to understand that [...] that part of me is possible and it’s still there.” In this way, youth theatre forms something of a touchstone, or a constant to refer back to throughout the stresses of a medical career.

“It’s okay to spend time and effort on something which [...] is just a creative endeavour in itself. That’s worth something.”



Case Study #3: Lisa



Lisa (40) is a **Depute Headteacher** at a large comprehensive secondary school in Fife. Before her promotion to Depute, she taught history for ten years at a number of challenging schools in Scotland, and occupied a Principal Teacher role for three of those years. Throughout her own time in secondary school, Lisa attended **Carnegie Youth Theatre** in Dunfermline. She jumped at the opportunity to join after asking about a photograph of the company which was hanging in the original Stephen's Bakery, and she now attributes much of her professional success to the confidence and work ethic which she developed there:

"I keep going back to confidence, but [without youth theatre] there's no way I would have had the confidence to do even teaching, I would say."

For Lisa, teaching is largely "an acting job", and one which demands huge amounts of confidence. She describes how teaching often involves playing a role when enforcing rules; it's important for her to react in a certain way, even though she is no longer actually surprised by most misbehaviour after several years in the job. Teaching and working in a school more generally also means having to deal with unanticipated problems and difficult situations, and Lisa credits her ability to appear calm under pressure to her time in youth theatre:

"My last headteacher used to say I was like a swan [...] things could be going really badly, and it would look like it was not fazing me at all, but [...] you need to do that when you're on stage. Things are going wrong around about you left, right, and centre, but you need to smile, and you need to pretend that you know what you're doing [...] and that's definitely something I keep in mind."

Lisa feels that this unfailing sense of confidence is also what has helped her in her role as a depute headteacher. As a depute, she has found that she has to "take initiative a lot more" than as a teacher, she has to be "self-motivated", and "be really good at teamwork". She has to work and stand her ground within "a very close-knit team", and in the event of disagreements "it's about trying to find [...] conflict resolution sometimes". Lisa attributes her skills and confidence in these areas to her years at Carnegie Youth Theatre, where she learnt to work well with people she wouldn't have always chosen to work with, and to find a common ground with them in order to achieve a common goal.

Lisa remembers herself as a busy and happy child. She attended dance classes and played the violin, but it was her experience of youth theatre which built her confidence and her dedication to hard work. She recalls loving it straight away, and immediately wanting to follow the example and standard set by the older participants: "I wanted to grow up to be like them."

"In youth theatre, if you were good at it you got good parts, and that encouraged me to want to try harder [...] I think it probably changed my whole idea about myself, and I'd gone from being this person who kind of coasted everything I did [...] It gave me a drive I'd never had before, and that just came from knowing if you worked hard you'd be rewarded."

Comparing youth theatre to her other extracurricular activities, Lisa emphasises the ways in which regular praise, positive reinforcement, and opportunities for self-evaluation were crucial to the

development of her confidence and work ethic. She remembers being complimented on her performances both in rehearsals and after shows, being able to look back at videos to see for herself how much she had improved from show to show, and the validation of feeling that her achievements were especially personal. Whereas any praise received elsewhere often related to work she had done, the praise she received at youth theatre gave her *“a sort of inner confidence to say: well, actually I’m really good at that, and that’s me that’s made me good at that”*. Youth theatre helped her to consolidate her sense of self and to feel confident in and of herself in a way that school and her other activities didn’t.

“I did start to see that hard work pays off, which everyone tells you, but I think there I could see it.”

Lisa describes this hard work not only as a dedication to learning her lines, to practising at home, or to focusing during rehearsals, but also as a dedication to building strong relationships with others in the company. She recalls learning to develop a sense of mutual trust with her castmates very swiftly and investing in those relationships in order to create a great production. As a result of this work, Lisa went on to join the youth cast in an adult musical theatre company and was cast in one of her dream roles there: the role of Liesl in *The Sound of Music*.

“I don’t think I’d be the same person without it, to be honest. If I hadn’t seen that picture in that bakers, I often think: where would I be? I don’t think my life would have turned out the same [...] I don’t think I would have gone into teaching.”

Lisa attributes not only her teaching career, but also her sense of self and can-do attitude to the confidence she gained from youth theatre. She grounds her ability to try new things and take on new challenges in that confidence, and when bullying at university shook her confidence, she remembers returning to Carnegie Youth Theatre to consolidate it again. Going back reminded her that she has *“this whole group of people [...] who actually do value me for me”*, and since then amateur musical theatre has remained an outlet for her throughout her adult life.

She is now a member of adult amateur musical theatre companies and performs with them regularly, often alongside long-lasting friends from her youth theatre days. She feels strongly that *“having an outlet or an avenue outside of work helps”*, and cannot overstate the benefits of her theatre involvement on her happiness and wellbeing. She emphasises that even talking about her time at Carnegie Youth Theatre makes her smile.

Lisa even brings her love of musical theatre into the classroom, drawing parallels between the importance of good storytelling to both history education and to theatre. She has used lyrics from *Hairspray* to teach the US civil rights movement, *Miss Saigon* to illuminate the Vietnam War, and even *Dirty Dancing 2* to shed light on the Cuban Missile Crisis. She again credits youth theatre for the confidence necessary to try these alternative teaching methods, and describes how well students have responded to these alternative forms of learning.

“I do genuinely attribute quite a lot of my success to the start that was made and the experience I had [at youth theatre].”



Case Study #4: Ian



Ian (38) is a **Train Conductor** who has been working on the Scottish railway for 13 years. His job varies hour-to-hour and day-to-day, but is primarily a people-facing role as he patrols trains, interacts with passengers, and resolves travel problems. His job therefore demands high adaptability and strong people skills, both of which he attributes to his years of youth theatre. From his early teens to his mid-20s, Ian attended **Perth Youth Theatre**, and eventually spent one year as a Trainee Drama Worker leading sessions and Assistant Directing a show there.

“Reacting to different situations, reading a room, assessing situations quickly and reacting to them accordingly, that’s all skills that are learned and developed in a youth theatre environment.”

Ian describes his job principally as *“a performance every day”*, in which he has to respond to a variety of situations

all the time, and in which nothing is predictable. The nature of his job changes depending on the time of day and the route; he could be dealing with commuters one hour, day-tripping families another hour, and intoxicated clubgoers the next. Due to the variety of activities that he experienced at youth theatre, however, Ian has found that he thrives in this environment and says that it’s the *“total variety”* that *“keeps me going”*. He adds that he often draws especially on his improvisation skills when dealing with difficult passengers or unanticipated problems:

“Having to be quick, having to have a response quickly, that comes up a lot, particularly late at night when [...] there can be quite a lot of heated environments and a lot of tension. Being able to come away with a quick one-liner, a quick response to somebody can totally diffuse and change a situation within a second, and definitely having experience of having to do that in improv classes and all the rest of it has stood me in good stead for coping with those situations.”

For Ian, participating in youth theatre throughout his teenage years changed his idea of where his life could go, and helped him to realise that he could choose to pursue other skills and interests outside of school and academia. Whilst he did well at school, he remembers realising that he didn’t have to be *“stuck in the finish-school-go-to-uni-get-a-job kind of mentality”*, and that youth theatre *“opened up new possibilities”* for the kind of life he wanted to live and the kind of work he wanted to do.

Before starting youth theatre, Ian recalls being a *“very introverted”* child, with few friends and little connection to those his own age. He felt that he *“didn’t really fit in anywhere at school”* and *“just kind of muddled along”*. When he joined Perth Youth Theatre, however, he found a *“core group”* of friends, and describes connecting to a *“positive energy”* from the very beginning. He had never found this anywhere else before, and attributes it largely to the *“safe space”* which the leaders created and encouraged:

“Obviously the first few weeks were a bit intimidating and a bit overwhelming at times, but once you kind of realised that it was a safe space – because nothing you do there is wrong, everything is celebrated and embraced and worked with – once you realise that, it opens you up to so much possibility and so much opportunity to express yourself in a way that you wouldn’t do anywhere else, for fear of being wrong or being judged.”

Ian emphasises the importance of having this “*space to express yourself while you’re learning who you are*”, and credits his youth theatre leaders with providing that space. He remembers receiving “*constant positive reinforcement*” from them, and becoming more confident as a result – not only at youth theatre, but also at home and at school. He remembers youth theatre as a space which broke down barriers between typical teenage ingroups, which encouraged everyone to work out who they really were, and which emboldened them to be themselves.

Ian recalls benefitting, too, from the sheer variety of activities which Perth Youth Theatre offered during his time there. The range of “*stage-fighting nights, scriptwriting nights, improv nights, movement nights*” allowed him to develop a range of skills in addition to rehearsing for shows. The most important outcome of this for Ian was the realisation that he thrived on variety – a priority which he has carried through into his professional life as an adult:

“I was a jack of all trades and a master of none, but I enjoyed that [...] and that’s what’s stood me in good stead for, you know, going forward into other both theatrical and non-theatrical things I went into in the future. Being able to dip my toe into all the different things that we did, and draw on those experiences, it was of huge benefit to me not just in theatrical life but in normal life as well.”

Since leaving Perth Youth Theatre, Ian has continued to be involved with various amateur dramatic companies in Perth and across Fife, and one of the highlights of his amateur dramatic career has been playing the part of Tobias Ragg in a production of *Sweeney Todd*. His “*core group*” of friends from youth theatre remain his core group of friends to this day, and he even met his wife through an amateur musical theatre group. He therefore credits youth theatre and later theatrical opportunities to which it led him with a great deal of his personal happiness and fulfilment, as well as with the professional skills it has given him.

In addition to these skills and experiences, Ian feels strongly that his time at Perth Youth Theatre instilled in him a belief that it is impossible to make accurate assumptions about others based merely on appearance, a first impression, or brief interaction. He has carried this conviction through both his professional and personal life:

“All the people that go to youth theatre [...] it was a whole range of people, from all different backgrounds, all different experiences, all different appearances, all different physicalities, everything – and everyone would surprise you, week in and week out, with things they would do, things they would say, things you wouldn’t necessarily expect at first glance from somebody. That really opens your eyes to the fact that you can’t judge a book by its cover, you don’t know what’s underneath, you don’t know what somebody’s capable of until they show you.”

Case Study #5: Laura



Laura (37) is an **Archivist**. She currently works with historic hospital records for the NHS, but has over ten years of experience working in archives at the Glasgow Citizens Theatre, the University of Glasgow, and the Glasgow Women's Library. Before discovering her love of archives, however, Laura initially considered pursuing a career in acting. She attended classes and summer courses with **Scottish Youth Theatre** as a teenager, and whilst she studied history in the end, she still attributes many of the skills she uses in her job as an archivist to those youth theatre classes and courses:

"I feel doing youth theatre has made me a more empathetic person [...] the ability to empathise with people, and – without sounding too odd – get inside people's heads, understand people's motivations, they play quite a big part in my job."

Laura's job as an archivist for the NHS often involves retrieving sensitive historic hospital records for family history researchers, and these records can include upsetting content. When working with these researchers, Laura has found herself drawing on the emotional intelligence and empathy which she believes she developed at youth theatre. She tries to put herself in the researcher's shoes in order to support them, to understand their motivations for seeking out potentially upsetting records, and to help them process them.

Another major part of Laura's job has been presenting at conferences, most notably at the Imperial War Museum in London, and for the Archives & Records Association. She credits youth theatre with giving her the confidence and storytelling ability to present well, and to stand her ground in Q&A sessions:

"Being part of youth theatre, it sort of gave me the confidence to go out and be Laura the Presenter, Laura the Confident Researcher [...] To just have that confidence without appearing arrogant was a big help – and also the importance of finding a story, finding a hook, of getting people engaged with your idea and engaged with what you're presenting [...] That goes back to the very early days of doing youth theatre, where your teacher or facilitator says: 'Right, you've got three minutes to make up a story connecting a banana and a car!'"

For Laura, there is a direct link between these kinds of youth theatre activity and the skills she uses at work. She believes that the "confidence-building and the ability to tell stories" which youth theatre gave her have had a great impact on the way she does her job today.

Laura describes herself as having been a "quite shy" and "quite bookish" child, whose interests differed from those of her friends at school. Her school drama teacher recommended that she try Scottish Youth Theatre classes, and Laura found there a group of likeminded friends who she felt she could be herself with.

"I met a lot of people who were into similar things. They were into theatre, they were into drama, they were into reading, they were into just talking about your imagination and making up silly games and things like that."

Laura remembers classes at Scottish Youth Theatre as a space in which to grow her confidence, to

make friends, and to work out who she was outside of the social pressures of school and her peers there. She relished the independence that travelling into Glasgow each Saturday gave her, but also the opportunities to play and be childlike when she arrived. The classes were very workshop based and involved a lot of improvisation, giving plenty of scope for the imagination and for “acting a bit like a kid”:

“I think a lot of teenagers [...] wanted to be more grown up, and they wanted to be recognised as an adult, and I didn’t feel quite ready to do that. So, it was nice being involved in drama games where you could act a bit like a kid and have a bit of fun and then work on projects together.”

After a year of classes at Scottish Youth Theatre, Laura gained a place on the summer Foundation Course, which she describes as “probably one of the best summers of my life”. It was during these two focused weeks of youth theatre that Laura felt she really had the chance to “find out a bit more about who I was as a person, which is really hard to do when you’re a teenager, because you’re surrounded by your peers who you want to like you, and you sort of do that by mirroring what they’re doing, not necessarily what you want to do.”

The result was a further boost to Laura’s confidence and self-belief, and this led to her gaining a place on the following summer’s five-week Performance & Production Course. Ending with a production at what was then the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (now the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland), this “felt like a step up”, and gave Laura a taste of “what it would be like to be a professional actor”.

The confidence and love of acting which these youth theatre experiences gave Laura led to her pursuing an HNC in Acting & Performance. Whilst she later chose to pursue a history degree, she has still carried the skills she gained from youth theatre through into her professional and personal life as an adult:

“I would have to say that I think my life would be incredibly different if I hadn’t had the opportunity to take part in youth theatre. I don’t think I would have the confidence that I have today. I certainly wouldn’t have some of the longer-lasting friendships that I have today as well.”

In addition to the impact that youth theatre has had on the way she does her job as an archivist, Laura believes the confidence it helped her to build has also been immensely helpful to her as a parent. She remembers feeling very uncertain when she had her first child, and found the experience of entering a toddlers’ group somewhat “intimidating and anxiety-inducing”. However, she drew on her youth theatre experiences and the attitude of “I just have to go in and do it” which she developed there, and was immensely glad later that she did.

Laura also remains very close to friends she made at Scottish Youth Theatre; in particular, two of the friends she made on the summer Foundation Course are still her two closest friends today. Outside of work, she still pursues an imaginative outlet in the form of creative writing, which she attributes, too, to her time at youth theatre: “I do enjoy creative writing, and again that’s something [...] that youth theatre helped flourish, because again it equips you with all those tools to think about character, how a character develops, how their story develops, how the world they inhabit develops as well.”

Despite not pursuing a career in acting, then, Laura still credits her years at Scottish Youth Theatre with much of her professional success and personal fulfilment as an adult:

“I think it is something that I think sometimes could be seen as ‘oh it’s just another club for kids to do’, but it is a lot more than that. It builds friendships, it builds confidence, it allows people to use their imaginations [...] I just really enjoyed being part of youth theatre.”

Case Study #6: Gemma



Gemma (23) is a **Community Arts Producer, Coordinator, and Administrator**. They have worked for a variety of theatre companies, arts festivals, charity initiatives, and arts access organisations, drawing on a skillset which they attribute to the opportunities they were offered by Toonspeak in Glasgow. Having experienced homelessness, abuse, and mental health struggles as a teenager, they credit Toonspeak's SHINE programme for LGBT youth with changing the course of their life.

"I went through some fairly dark times, and [...] when I think about it in context, I think youth arts and youth theatre was definitely that light at the end of the tunnel for me – a light that I didn't know existed until I started interacting with it, but it definitely was the thing that changed the course of my life."

Describing the range of jobs which they have done across the arts sector and the variety of projects on which they have worked, Gemma attributes their skills and their confidence to the mentorship which they received from leaders and administrators at Toonspeak. Having attended the SHINE programme for LGBT youth, they were inspired to pursue a HNC in Working with Communities and to complete a placement with Toonspeak. This was soon turned into a paid position, and Gemma entirely credits the enthusiastic mentorship they received whilst in that role for their success in arts production, coordination, and administration since:

"They instilled the logistics in my brain, the ability to go this is the start of a project, this is the middle, this is the end, this is how to write a funding application, this is how to write a budget, this is how to organise a Google drive [...] They taught me those skills incredibly well [...] That's all completely down to Toonspeak and to how they mentored me."

For Gemma, youth theatre provided an opportunity to reconnect with the arts after an earlier traumatic experience in acting. In addition to their professional skillset, Toonspeak helped them to build their confidence and to embrace their preference for arts production and administration over creation and facilitation. They say Toonspeak gave them the confidence *"to move down that road a bit more"*, and they are now the founder of both an LGBT Youth Theatre themselves, and of an organisation for sapphic writers.

Gemma came to the Toonspeak SHINE programme via LGBT Youth Scotland, which their keyworker had recommended to them. At the time, they were living in a homeless unit in which they faced homophobic and transphobic abuse, but Toonspeak provided a safe and stable environment away from the unit. Leaders took the time to meet them before sessions for wellbeing check-ins, and they were able to spend time with other young people who were facing similar struggles:

"[It] was specifically for young LGBT people who were going through mental distress and just the knowledge that I was around young people who were going through similar things [...] I think that made a difference, just being around people who knew and understood."

The SHINE programme enabled Gemma to enjoy acting again after having encountered access barriers

to casting when they came out as non-binary at 15. They relished the opportunity to “*be arty again*”, and to feel a sense of belonging within the arts. They describe how “*welcoming*” and “*authentic*” the sessions were, as a result of being “*very, very youth led*”, and how they “*very quickly felt part of the family*”. Where sexuality, gender, and pronouns had previously been issues to be questioned or discussed, Gemma found that they were simply accepted as a part of who they are at youth theatre. This ultimately helped them to build their confidence and feel able to look to the future:

“It was that experience which made me go: oh my goodness, things could be so much better.”

It was then that Gemma began their HNC placement with Toonspeak, which soon became a job as Office & Workshop Assistant, that they felt things “*really clicked*”. They remember “*falling in love with arts administration*”, and enjoying the opportunity to lead some youth theatre activities too. They credit the mentorship they received during this placement with their professional development and fulfilment since, but they also credit this experience with their sense of personal development and fulfilment. For Gemma, youth theatre represents a “*fallback*”, and remains an enduringly positive reference point in their life:

“Youth theatre has always been the stable thing for me. It’s always been that thing that’s pulled me back into reality, and feeling comfortable and at home in myself and with other people again.”

Gemma’s experience with youth theatre has even given them the confidence to return to amateur acting as an adult and to form new, positive memories in relation to acting. They have also gained a third-year, direct-entry place on the BA (Hons) Drama & Production course at the University of the Highlands and Islands, which they again greatly attribute to the confidence they gained from their time at Toonspeak.

In addition to these impacts, Gemma also expresses gratitude to youth theatre for changing what they describe as “*the very fabrics of my personal life*”. They met their now fiancée at Toonspeak, and they are set to live a life they describe as their “*teenage self’s dream*”: in the countryside with their wife and two dogs.

Reflecting again on the difficulties of their teenage years, Gemma cannot emphasise enough the difference which youth theatre made to the direction of their life, both professional and personal:

“I would not be the person that I am today without youth theatre [...] I think if it wasn’t for Toonspeak, I wouldn’t have felt comfortable even thinking about being involved in the arts at all.”

Case Study #7: Stephen



Stephen (46) is currently a **Professor of Practice in International Relations** at the University of St Andrews. Prior to this, he worked with various international NGOs and institutions on peacebuilding, energy, and climate change. He has also served as **MP for North East Fife**, during which time he sat on the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, and was his party's spokesperson for International Affairs & Europe. Reflecting on his career, Stephen attributes some of his success to the years he spent as a teenager at **Perth Youth Theatre**.

"I would have really struggled if I hadn't gone to youth theatre [...] I'm not sure I would have done the things that I did subsequently had it not been for participation in youth theatre."

Stephen particularly attributes skills he relied upon during his political career to his time at youth theatre. When making broadcast appearances on news programmes and shows such as *Question Time*, he drew especially on the confidence, articulacy, and concision which he learnt at youth theatre. These skills also proved valuable when he was asked to be his party's spokesperson on International Affairs & Europe during the Brexit process:

"Unusually for a new MP, I was made a spokesperson straight away [...] and all of the skillsets that you pick up at youth theatre apply to that political environment where you're trying to articulate ideas in a limited set of time, often without notes, and do so confidently when people are trying to put you off."

In addition to this, Stephen believes that youth theatre was a key influence on his empathetic and international outlook. He remembers having the opportunity to engage with others *"from a wide range of different backgrounds"*, and learning how to *"step inside the shoes of somebody else"*. One standout memory for Stephen is of *Peace Child*, an international production for which young people came from 14 countries to Perth in 1991, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall. He says this opened his eyes to an *"international perspective from a young age"*, and helped him to realise *"that your perspective is just one perspective"*. He has tried to carry this through to his adult life, both professionally and personally. When Stephen first started at Perth Youth Theatre, he was struggling with having started at a different secondary school to his friends from primary school, and with his parents' separation. At youth theatre, though, he found *"a supportive, comfortable environment"* in which he felt he could really be himself, and in which he could *"really thrive"*:

"I just enjoyed it straight away, and I got on with the other kids who were there as well. It was a bunch of kids with whom I probably had a lot more in common than many in my school year."

For Stephen, youth theatre differed from his other sports-based extracurriculars in that it wasn't dependent on skill or physicality, and in that it also offered opportunities for social and intellectual development. He describes his youth theatre as a *"supportive group"* where *"people don't mind how good you are"*. It was a place to gain skills and confidence, as well as – crucially – a sense of self-assurance which he later found valuable when working alongside or even in opposition to more socioeconomically privileged peers.

In addition to these skills and this self-assurance, Stephen recalls gaining a more liberal and accepting outlook from his days at youth theatre, and expresses gratitude to his youth theatre leader for this. His leader inspired him not only through his efforts to coordinate the *Peace Child* production, thus exposing him to new cultures and to an international perspective, but also through his openness about his sexuality. In an otherwise “not very diverse” town, this was a positive experience:

“Our theatre leader was an openly gay man, and that doesn’t sound like a big deal, but it really was for some people at that time. He was so good about us learning about that, and being more accepting, and hopefully being slightly better citizens as a result of how he conducted himself and talked to us about that – because although it was easier in a theatre environment, it was especially good for kids like me (white, heterosexual, middle class) to get an understanding of how tricky it could be for people who [...] some people found unacceptable.”

As well as the skills he believes have very evidently contributed to his professional success across international relations, politics, and academia, Stephen therefore credits youth theatre with one of his core life values. He tries to pass this onto his students today, telling them “that academically it’s great you can read a book and understand it, but actually almost more important is [...] all the skills that you won’t pick up through academic learning”. He describes these skills more specifically as the “ability just to try and get on with people, to try and seek to empathise”. He admits that not everybody (himself included) can get it right every time, but emphasises the importance nonetheless of understanding that everyone has something to say which is “worth hearing, and talking about”.

Stephen is grateful, too, to youth theatre for enabling him to develop a group of friends who have remained friends for life. He describes their friendship as a “unique bond” made special by the youth theatre experiences they shared together, and he greatly values still having friends from the town in which he grew up. He feels, “it keeps you grounded, it gives you that sense of a local identity regardless of where you’re living the world”:

“I can’t understate how grateful I am to have gone to youth theatre and the way that it had such a positive influence on so many different aspects of my life.”



Case Study #8: Vicki



Vicki (41) is a **District Nurse**. Her work involves visiting patients who are housebound, providing medical care, and offering support to patients and their families. Since the start of the pandemic, Vicki's job has increasingly involved the provision of end-of-life care to those who have received late diagnoses or who have chosen to die at home. Reflecting on this, she attributes many of the skills upon which she has had to draw during this difficult time to her early teenage years at **Scottish Youth Theatre**, and particularly to the focus there on improvisation and imagination.

“Suddenly you're thrown into this position where you're doing an awful lot of really personal stuff, or finding out people's deepest darkest fears [...] Nothing prepares you for that like improv, because if somebody [tells you] that they're terrified to die, you've got to think fast. You've got to be ready to have these conversations and have something up your sleeve at all times. Without a shadow of a doubt, that's helped.”

Vicki describes the skills she gained at youth theatre as a “*toolkit*” upon which she can draw during these difficult interactions with terminally ill patients and with their families. She reflects that her ability to reflect a patient's feelings back to them, to listen actively to their fears, and to respond empathetically when they say something unexpected derive from her youth theatre experiences. In particular, she credits youth theatre with her ability to be unafraid of sitting with a silence, and so allowing a patient the space to reflect and to share further if they wish.

In addition to the specific skills involved in providing end of life care at home, Vicki describes district nursing more generally as a job which calls for a lot of confidence. She details how important communication skills, teamwork skills, and presentation skills are. She says that it is important “*to be really assertive*”, and that she believes youth theatre gave her the “*inner confidence*” to know that she could meet all of the demands of the job from the beginning:

“I would have been a bit of a work-in-progress with my confidence when I started nursing had I not had that basis when I was younger.”

For Vicki, youth theatre helped her to build the confidence she needed to deal with the unknown and with new situations. This has proved valuable to her as a district nurse, particularly in the past two years, but it has also proved valuable to her in her personal life.

Vicki remembers being a “*reasonably confident*” child, but not having an “*outlet*” or building blocks for that confidence. Her friends were scattered across Scotland due to several moves for her mum's job, but attending Scottish Youth Theatre once her family moved to Glasgow helped her with “*finding my feet a bit*”.

She describes Scottish Youth Theatre classes as an opportunity to push herself out of her comfort zone, and remembers feeling comfortable doing so because everyone there was in the same boat with regards to hardly knowing anybody else. In particular, she remembers her youth theatre classes as “*a freeing experience*”, due to their improvisation focus. There were no productions to work towards, and so no pressure to learn lines or to compete for parts:

“There was nobody issuing scripts and saying: ‘you’ve got to learn that’. It was all pretty stress-free. We didn’t have any of that burden upon us. It was just: ‘go out there, be creative, have fun, try doing this’ [...] and you could just be completely free with it, and let your guard down, and just lose your inhibitions in front of, essentially, a group of people you didn’t know.”

Vicki remembers feeling so free in large part because of the positive environment created by her youth theatre leaders. She recalls them being very different from her teachers. They had *“a really good sense of fun”*, and never appeared as authoritative figures. Instead, *“they were just there as facilitators – they sort of facilitated our fun, but we were obviously learning and growing through it without really realising.”* She believes she would have responded very differently had she felt she was being told what to do, and would not have got nearly as much out of the experience.

For Vicki, youth theatre differed from her other extracurricular activities because nobody could be left out, nobody could be left *“on the bench”*, or feel that others were favourites with the leaders. She *“lived for”* her Saturday youth theatre classes, and recalls feeling that *“everybody was important, and everybody was valued”* during them, because everybody *“had something to bring to the party”*. In particular, she remembers youth theatre as an opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds, and to work with everyone in groups which changed week by week. She believes this experience taught her *“acceptance of others [...] at an early age, which can only be a good thing.”*

After finishing secondary school, Vicki initially decided to pursue an acting career, and attended a drama school in London for a year. She found that this *“scratched an itch”* for her, however, and later decided to move back to Scotland to train as a nurse:

“It goes back to that just having confidence to just try something different, and to put yourself in a position where you don’t know anybody again.”

Vicki attributes even the confidence necessary to make this career change to her youth theatre history, and believes she has carried this ability to throw herself into new situations and to meet new people throughout both her professional and personal life. She remembers that, for her, a *“key part of the excitement”* was that *“unknown”* element:

“I think going forward that set me up really well, because I continuously have sort of done that into adulthood.”

This has given Vicki a sense of self-assurance and independence in her personal life as well as at work, and she reflects that she doesn’t find things such as travelling without her family or attending social events where she only knows one person as scary as she otherwise might.

Vicki also expresses gratitude toward Scottish Youth Theatre, and the drama school experience to which it led, for providing her with a set of friends for life. She describes how these friendships help to ground her, and take her back to a time when she had fewer responsibilities and cares. There is *“something really comforting and lovely”* for her in finding that escape in those friendships, and she believes she shares a particular *“bond”* with her youth theatre friends:

“It was just sort of a magical experience, really. There’s nothing like being a kid and walking into a theatre, but then being allowed to go onstage.”

Key Findings

Analysis of the case studies reveals that the long-term impacts of participation in youth theatre are often multiple and intertwined.

What are some of the long-term impacts of participation in youth theatre on participants' professional lives? (Research Question 1)

The participants universally attributed elements of their work ethic, career successes, and personal sense of fulfilment to having been involved with youth theatre in their formative years.

The eight participants differed from one another in their varied careers to date; however, the experience of participating in youth theatre affected their career selection, with participants varying from directly choosing to work in roles within the creative sector to identifying particular skills or aspects of their youth theatre experience which had resonated with them (for example: variety, storytelling, working with others) and seeking roles which included these. Many described their jobs, as varied as they were across the eight case studies, as being basically 'acting' or 'playing a role'; they reported that this was something they were able to do confidently because of the skills and self-assurance which they gained through their youth theatre experience.

All of the participants directly attributed their emotional intelligence to youth theatre, describing ways in which their youth theatre experience had developed their active listening skills and enabled them to better understand people by reading their tone and body language. Consequently, the participants found themselves able to work well in teams. They reported easily finding common ground with diverse colleagues in order to diffuse any arising tensions.

Drawing together these skills, the participants described the ways in which becoming confident communicators and effective leaders had helped them in the workplace.

What are some of the long-term impacts of participation in youth theatre on participants' personal lives? (Research Question 2)

Many of the participants reflected on youth theatre as having been an extremely positive part of their teenage lives. As well as being a joyful experience and providing them with something constructive to do with their time, youth theatre proved to be vital to their self-expression. It provided a way to build confidence and discover who they really were. The participants largely attributed this to the sense of community created by their youth theatre leaders, the environment of kindness, compassion, and camaraderie fostered by their leaders, and the opportunity to meet both like-minded and different individuals in a space which was separate from the day-to-day pressures of school- and family-life.

Many of the participants formed friendships through youth theatre which have endured into adulthood, and some even met partners through youth theatre or other creative outlets which followed on later. Indeed, most of the youth theatre participants continue with theatre-based or other creative activities to this day.

These experiences have contributed to improved wellbeing and sense of purpose; they have their beginnings in the youth theatre experience itself and have lasted well beyond.

What can we infer from the similarities and differences between the long-term impacts reported by participants? (Research Question 3)

The patterns in impacts reported by the participants demonstrate where the value of the youth theatre experience lies.

Youth theatre broadened the horizons of the participants, enabling them to engage with new opportunities and requiring them to meet (and find ways to get on with) a new and diverse group of people. The youth theatre participants felt that they were more open-minded people as a consequence. Youth theatre is a safe and equitable space where participants can express themselves openly and are accepted for who they are. At youth theatre the participants found a unique place to work through their issues and find like-minded peers, which developed confidence and feelings of personal value and ultimately led to embedded feelings of independence and self-belief.

The youth theatre workers were encouraging mentors in the lives of the participants and modelled positive leadership. As well as creating a supportive environment where the participants could develop their sense of self, some participants directly referenced their youth theatre workers as having had a continued positive influence on their own leadership style.

Youth theatre gave the participants multiple tools on which to draw in their adult lives. Undertaking collaborative creativity, playfulness, and improvisation in the youth theatre setting necessitated teamwork and trust, which enabled the participants to develop their emotional intelligence. Needing to be being calm under pressure and deal with the unpredictable helped them to build their resilience and confidence in trying new things.

Many of the participants noted that they felt grateful for having developed these skills and qualities during their teenage years, as many other adults in their lives had needed to learn these later.

In Summary

To summarise, the comparative analysis of the eight case studies has identified six key long-term impacts of participation in youth theatre, experienced to varying degrees and in varying ways by different participants. These are:

- Confidence (or self-belief)
- Emotional Intelligence (or ability to empathise with others)
- Resilience (or ability to respond well to stress and/or pressure)
- Teamwork and leadership skills
- Emotional wellbeing
- Broadened horizons

A number of features of the youth theatre experience particularly contribute to these outcomes:

- Skills development inherent in the creative activity
- Nurturing facilitation
- Supportive environment / community

In combination, these features create a system of continual positive reinforcement meaning that any outcomes of the experience become embedded in the individual as personal values – thus having a lifelong influence and leading to the positive longer-term impacts in personal lives and careers.

Appendix: Methodology

The methodology for this multiple-case study was comprised of four stages, designed to produce an output of six to eight case studies. These four stages were as follows:

- Design and circulation of a web survey.
- Analysis of responses to the web survey.
- Design and conduct of semi-structured interviews.
- Analysis of responses to semi-structured interviews.

This appendix will detail each of these stages in turn before discussing the relative strengths and limitations of the methodology as a whole and making recommendations for future research.

Web Survey: Design and Circulation

The first stage of this research entailed the design and circulation of a survey: *'How Has Youth Theatre Impacted Your Life?'*. The primary purpose of this survey was to identify potential case study subjects for interview; however, it also served a secondary purpose, which was to provide a wider data set in which to situate those case studies.

The survey began with a screening question to ensure all respondents had participated in youth theatre in Scotland, where 'youth theatre' was defined as *"a group or organisation which engages young people as active participants in the performing arts and where their participation is central to the motivation of the creative process"*.

Following this screening question, the first section of the survey collected data pertaining to the circumstances and nature of a respondent's youth theatre participation. All questions in the first section of the survey were compulsory, but respondents were encouraged to answer the open questions in as much or as little detail as they wished.

It began by asking four multiple-choice questions:

- What kind(s) of youth theatre were you involved in?
- In what region(s) were you involved in youth theatre?
- At what age(s) were you involved in youth theatre?
- For how long were you involved in youth theatre?

It then asked two open questions, so that respondents could describe the circumstances of their initial involvement in youth theatre in their own words:

- How did you first become involved in youth theatre?
- Why did you first become involved in youth theatre?

This first section then asked respondents a third open question:

- What is your current occupation?

Having collected this factual data, the first section then asked respondents for their views. It asked: *"How far would you agree or disagree that your involvement in youth theatre has had a positive impact on your professional and / or personal life as an adult?"* Respondents were offered multiple-choice

options in response, but could only select one: Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; and Strongly Disagree. This was followed up with a final open question: *“How would you describe the impact of your involvement in youth theatre on your professional and / or personal life as an adult?”*

The second section of the survey aimed to collect special category data about each respondent in order to help me to contextualise their first section responses. The questions in this section therefore asked about each respondent’s age, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and disability status. All of the questions in this section were optional. I was aware that it would be useful to have this information in order to help me to select a diverse range of potential case study subjects for interview, but I was also aware that it was not crucial. My priority was to maximise number of respondents, and so I did not want to risk deterring any respondents by insisting that they disclose special category data.

Furthermore, although this kind of data is often collected via multiple-choice questions so that it can be analysed using quantitative methods, I took the decision in this case mostly to ask open questions, so that each respondent could describe their identity in their own words. Given the qualitative and case-based nature of the research, I decided that it was important to collect data that was as specific and individualised as possible. My aim in designing and circulating the survey was not, after all, to collate demographic data in order to generalise across respondents, but rather to collect as many potential case study subjects as possible in order to choose among specific cases. Asking for special category data via open questions also removed the possibility that a respondent might experience erasure or discrimination as a result of the omission of their particular identity from multiple-choice options.

The open questions for this second section of the survey were thus as follows:

- What is your age?
- How would you describe your gender identity?
- How would you describe your sexual orientation?
- How would you describe your race and ethnicity?

A final question then asked: *“Do you identify as having a disability?”* This was not an open question, but a multiple-choice question with ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ options. My reasoning for this was that an open question would seem to invite identification of or even details about a person’s specific disability, and I saw no need to collect medical information of this nature from respondents at this stage of the research.

The third and final section of the survey pertained to further participation in the research. This section asked: *“Would you be happy to be contacted by our researcher for a follow-up interview?”* If a respondent selected ‘Yes’ from the multiple choice options (‘Yes’ and ‘No’), a second question appeared. This was an open question asking for the respondent’s name, email address, and pronouns. The survey then completed and redirected to an optional prize draw by way of a thank you.

Circulation of the survey was carried out by the YTAG Marketing and Communications team via YTAG social media platforms and mailing lists. In order to reach those beyond YTAG’s immediate networks – i.e., beyond those working in youth theatre and the arts more widely – many communications included a call to action which asked recipients to forward and share the survey to and with their own professional and personal networks, as in the email excerpt below and the social media posts pictured over the page.

Can the youth theatre sector help to spread the word?

This is where we need the help of our network, and all the networking you do in your own lives. YTAG can't just cold-email people who were involved in youth drama several decades ago. But as social animals, we (as a sector) probably all keep in touch with some of these people personally...

Do you still see people from your own youth theatre days? Are they on your social networks? Do you work for an organisation that can help us amplify our message to a relevant audience? In short: can you spread the reach of our survey by getting it into inboxes of people who'd make good interview subjects?

Here is the [Survey Link](#), both for sharing with your contacts and for filling out yourself.

We'd really appreciate your help with sharing this, so we want to make it as quick as possible for you to pass the survey on. We've written some sample wording over on [our website](#) to help you share the message. Please feel free to use these ideas for social media posts, emails and messages to help you start the ball rolling in your network. There's even a prize draw for some restaurant vouchers on offer!



Web Survey: Analysis of Responses

The web survey launched on 6 April 2022 and closed on 24 April 2022. In that time, it received a total of 346 responses.

I began by separating the data into differently filtered sheets on an Excel database. The first sheet contained the control data of all unfiltered 346 responses. The second sheet filtered those responses to include only those who answered 'Yes' to the initial screening question, leaving 299 relevant responses. The third sheet then filtered those 299 responses to include only those who had agreed to further participation in the research and left contact details. This left 212 potential case study subjects.

I then separated these 212 respondents into two different sheets according to current occupation. I sorted respondents who work in the arts into one, and respondents who do not work in the arts into another. I read through every response on both of these sheets, and flagged every respondent whom I considered to be a promising interviewee; however, my criteria for flagging differed for the two sets of respondents.

On the sheet of respondents who do not work in the arts, my key criterion when deciding who to flag was their response to the open question: How would you describe the impact of your involvement in youth theatre on your professional and / or personal life as an adult?

Due again to the qualitative and case-based nature of the research, though, this was not my only criterion. I considered each response to that open question in the context of the respondent's other answers. For instance, if a respondent had been less forthcoming than others in response to that open question, but fell into one or more underrepresented categories with regards to region, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or disability status, I often flagged them. This was with the aim of ensuring diversity among the pool of potential interviewees.

On the sheet of respondents who work in the arts, I was much more selective in who I flagged. Most responses to the open question on the impact of involvement in youth theatre on respondents'

professional and / or personal lives were very similar and drew direct and predictable links between their youth theatre participation and their current occupation. I therefore only flagged those who had provided an especially distinctive answer to the open question and fell into one or more of the underrepresented categories listed above.

My reasoning for this difference in criteria was the importance of what Robert E. Stake has called 'potential for learning'³. Where I observed the long-term impacts of youth theatre participation reported by those who work in the arts were directly and predictably linked to their current occupation, in ways that even potentially obscured other impacts, I observed that those reported by respondents who do not work in the arts were less obvious and more varied. These respondents thus offered higher potential for learning.

After this initial process, then, I had narrowed the list of 212 potential case study subjects to a list of 71. Unfortunately, due to constraints on time and resources, this was still too long a list. I would not be able to interview all 71 respondents, and so this list needed to be narrowed further. I did this by grouping respondents who had similar occupations. For instance, all those in the medical profession formed one group; those who worked in the service industries formed another, and so on.

I then resolved to keep only two respondents from each group, with the aim of maintaining a range of occupations and so maximising potential for learning. I made these decisions again by considering their response to the open question on the impact of youth theatre involvement as well as and alongside the context of any special category data they had provided. This resulted in a list of 31 potential case study subjects, which was still too long a list, and so I further narrowed it by keeping only one respondent from each group.

This left a list of 16 potential case study subjects, which I considered a manageable number of interviews to conduct. I sent emails to each respondent to ask if they would agree to a 30-minute interview over Zoom, making clear that this did not amount to agreeing also to be a case study subject. Ten out of the 16 replied to agree to an interview, seven of whom did not work in the arts, and three of whom worked in the arts.

I managed interview bookings via Calendly, making sure to offer timeslots in the evenings and at weekends. This allowed interviewees to easily cancel and reschedule interviews.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Design and Conduct

I settled on a semi-structured interview style when designing the interviews. This allowed me to cover a set list of topics with each interviewee, so that I could compare answers more easily; but it also ensured that conversation would not be restricted to those topics alone and that I would be able to follow up naturalistically on whatever an interviewee might bring up.

My semi-structure for the interviews was as follows. I had four topics I wanted to cover with each interviewee, so these formed the four questions which I asked in every interview. Below each of these four questions, however, are a series of sub-questions which I asked variously depending on what each interviewee said in response to each of the set questions. In most interviews, I also asked spontaneous questions in order to follow up on the specifics of what the interviewee had shared. The basic question structure was as follows:

³ Robert E. Stake, *Qualitative Case Studies*, in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 3rd edn. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2005), pp. 443-66 (p. 451).

Can you tell me more about your life just before you started youth theatre? How would you describe yourself and your life as a young person?

- What was your home life like?
- How did you find school / university?
- What was your social life like? Who were your friends?
- What were you good at as a young person? What did you especially like doing?
- What did you struggle with as a young person? Is there anything you really didn't like doing?

Can you tell me more about your time participating in youth theatre? How would you describe your experiences?

- What kind of youth theatre activity did you do?
- What were the other participants like?
- What were the leaders like?
- Why did you start youth theatre?
- What made you want to continue doing youth theatre after those first few sessions?
- What do you think the leaders got right? What do you think they got wrong?
- Do you have any single standout memory, a particularly memorable moment?

What would you say you gained from youth theatre in the more immediate term, so whilst you were a participant and in the period just after?

- What skills do you think you gained?
- What values or views do you think you gained?
- Did you come to understand or see anything differently?
- How did your life change? What was different about your life during or after youth theatre, compared to before?
- Why did you stop going to youth theatre?

Can you tell me more about your life since youth theatre? How would you describe your professional and personal development?

- Would you attribute any of your professional or personal skills to youth theatre?
- Would you attribute any of your values or beliefs to youth theatre?
- Are there any requirements of either your current or past jobs that you feel particularly able to fulfil because of youth theatre?
- Are there any aspects of your personal life, such as friendships or interests or hobbies, that you would attribute to youth theatre?

Semi-Structured Interviews: Analysis of Responses

After concluding all ten interviews, I listened to the recording of each one and took notes under the four topic headings I had used for their semi-structure. I then compared responses across all ten interviewees, noting where they were similar and where they differed with regards to their reflections on the long-term impacts of their youth theatre participation on their professional and personal lives as adults.

The decision as to which interviewees to select as my final case study subjects was straightforward. The seven interviewees who did not work in the arts all constituted individual, interesting, and diverse narratives which I deemed to evidence between them a range of long-term impacts of participation in youth theatre.

Of the three interviewees who worked in the arts, one stood out to me as offering strong evidence of long-term impacts. The other two constituted strong evidence for the impact which the presence of a youth theatre group can have on remote communities on the Scottish islands; however, they were less useful for

evidencing specifically the long-term impact of youth theatre participation on the lives of individuals. This left me with eight selected interviewees, all of whom agreed to be case study subjects. I then sent a small number of follow-up questions to each of them, mostly in order to fact-check or collect more details pertaining to something they had mentioned in the interview. This allowed me to compile the eight case studies contained in this report.

Strengths, Limitations and Recommendations

This research was conducted by a research intern working on a part-time basis of two days per week for 30 weeks. This has necessarily resulted in certain limitations pertaining to time and resources. What follows is a brief evaluation of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the above methodology, and recommendations for further research in this area and in related areas.

Web Survey: Design & Circulation

Uptake of the survey was higher than anticipated, indicating that the length of the survey and focus of the questions were appropriate, and that the YTAS Marketing and Communications team's strategy for circulation was effective. Uptake could, however, have been even higher, particularly among minority groups, which would have allowed for a more diverse pool of potential case study subjects.

Where time and resources allow, I would recommend consideration of the following methods for future similar surveys:

- Direct outreach to charities, organisations, and intermediary bodies for minority groups and underrepresented professions, sectors, and industries.
- Issue press release on the survey and research project to regional and national press outlets.
- Use of funds to promote or sponsor posts on social media platforms.

Web Survey: Analysis of Responses

My filtering method was effective for the purpose of identifying promising case study subjects from the pool of survey respondents, and I believe I successfully prioritised potential for learning. However, this filtering method unavoidably involves individual bias on the part of the researcher. Whilst criteria can allow for diversity and inclusion of minority groups at each stage, those criteria are still judged subjectively by an individual researcher.

Constraints on time and resources also did not allow me to return to earlier stages of filtering when no respondents from certain minority groups agreed to an interview. This created a less diverse group of participants than intended.

Where time and resources allow, I would recommend consideration of the following methods for analysis of future similar surveys:

- Use of text analysis software to draw more precise insights from survey responses; this could draw out recurring themes across responses or frequency of certain words.
- If using a filtering method to narrow down a pool of potential participants, keep notes by each with your reasoning for flagging or not flagging, in case you return to review them later, and for accountability.
- Set quotas for diversity and inclusion of minority groups, in line with other demographic data

relating to the sector.

- If all respondents from a minority group do not agree to an interview, thus creating a less diverse group of participants than intended, return to earlier stages of filtering to invite others to interview.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Design and Conduct

The design of the interviews worked well. The chronological structure helped interviewees to move from recollections of their youth theatre experience to descriptions of their current lives to reflections on connections between the two. Not being constrained to a rigid set of questions also liberated both myself and interviewees to follow up on topics specific to their lives and impacts specific to their experience.

However, in the case of some interviews, the balance did tend to more discussion of the interviewee's time at youth theatre and life as a young person. This meant that I had less information from which to infer connections relating to the impacts of youth theatre for myself, and so was slightly more reliant on some interviewees' self-reports as to those long-term impacts than was ideal. The online format also meant that some interviews felt more stilted, or were more affected by technical issues, than was ideal.

Where time and resources allow, I would recommend consideration of the following when designing and conducting similar future interviews:

- Build in more opportunities to ask for detailed information on the focus of the research, and make the interview longer for this if necessary. In the case of this study, for instance, it would have helped to build in questions about an interviewee's typical day in the present, about the specific responsibilities attached to their occupation, and about the nature of their personal life.
- Conduct interviews in-person where circumstances allow.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Analysis

My analysis of interview recordings was effective for the purpose of selecting the final eight case studies and drawing from them the findings summarised at the end of this report. However, this analysis and thus the case studies themselves are lacking triangulating evidence, which it was not within the scope of this study to gather. This could have included reference to strategies and delivery plans from each case study subject's youth theatre group, and interviews with each case study subject's youth theatre leaders, current employers, colleagues, family, and/or friends.

Where time and resources allow, I would recommend consideration of the following when analysing similar future interviews and compiling similar case studies:

- Build in time to gather and use triangulating evidence.
- Compile full transcripts of the interviews and use text analysis software to draw more precise comparative insights from them.

About the Researcher



Ellie Mitchell is a SGSAH funded PhD researcher at the University of St Andrews, where she is writing a thesis on the influence of theatre on the novels of Virginia Woolf.

Ellie was also Manager of the Barron Theatre in St Andrews, and prior to her PhD she worked for two years as Production Manager at the ADC Theatre in Cambridge.

Image: Attendees at YTAS's *Interchange* event in March 2022 heard all about our upcoming research project with a briefing from Ellie.
© Andy Catlin.

About Youth Theatre Arts Scotland

Youth Theatre Arts Scotland is the national development organisation for Scotland's youth theatre sector. We believe in helping make the lives of young people in Scotland better through youth theatre. We exist to support, connect, and inspire youth theatre participants across Scotland and the adults who work with them.

- **Support:** We provide advice, information, grants, and resources which support youth theatre activity across Scotland.
- **Development:** We develop Scotland's youth theatre artform and workforce by providing a national programme of training, CPD, networking and events.
- **National Youth Events and Projects:** We host national festivals, projects and opportunities which increase access and ambition for Scotland's youth theatre participants.
- **The Sector's Intermediary:** We research and represent the needs and impact of Scotland's youth theatre community.

We support and develop a sector which engages 14,000 young people every week. YTAS has over 100 registered members operating throughout all 32 local authorities who engage the vast majority of participants in Scotland.

The members share in our belief that youth theatre is an ideal medium to encourage the dreams and visions of young people and to nurture their self-confidence. Through active engagement in their local community group, young theatre-makers develop social, personal and vocational skills, as well as developing their talents and confidence to realise their potential.

To find out more about our work, visit us at www.ytas.org.uk.

Cover Photography: © Andy Catlin, Perth Youth Theatre perform *Chaos* at YTAS's Interchange 2022.
Photography throughout: Kindly provided by our case study participants, from their own personal archives. No copyright infringement is intended.

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