

Larkin' about in Richmond



Larkin' About was a site-specific theatre project which took place over one week in August 2005 delivered by the Arts Service at the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames in partnership with the National Youth Theatre and the Parks and Open Spaces Department.

The Art Service's annual programme encompasses exhibitions, arts festivals and educational projects in addition to a specialist programme of targeted provision that aims to support persons disadvantaged to accessing cultural

provision or at risk of social exclusion. Building upon the success of our annual Larks in the Parks children's theatre festival we were keen to develop a programme strand that would actively target excluded young people aged 13 to 16 years with cultural opportunities available in their locality. Working in partnership with the National Youth Theatre we decided to commission a group of young people to respond to their community, their history and their environment through the use of theatre and we set them the challenging them to create a piece of site-specific theatre in the space of one week. The result of that week was an outstanding promenade site-specific performance which was attended by over 250 members of the local community in Hampton. The astonished reaction of the audience to the performance is a testament to the creative talent and personal commitment of all the people involved and the creative team which helped to shape this unique project.

The outcomes for participants included, recognition of their achievements by peers, family, project staff and general public, learning to negotiate with their peers and to resolve conflict through discussion, identifying new and appropriate role models, through direct contact with artists and project staff to whom the participants could relate and development of team work and collaborative skills.

The project also had a number of valuable outcomes for the arts service and its project partners including, building new relationships with young people who had no previous contact with the organisation and creating new relationships with the National Youth Theatre and several freelance arts practitioners. The project also created a successful collaboration with the Parks Department and an innovative use of a local open space.

What were the measures of success for the creative team? Peter Collins, NYT Associate Artist said:

"There were many, but chiefly, retaining and actively engaging all participants for the full week; creating an environment to enable participants to lead and therefore own the creation of content for the piece and enabling the young people to engage with and reflect on their local environment and history plus, of course, building confidence, self-esteem and communication skills amongst participants."

"The content of the work", he added, "was always participant led and the piece reflected the concerns of those involved in the light of research done by them. The Hatherop Rap in particular gave the team a voice they were proud of."

The last words belong to a participant... "Larkin' About during Summer 2005 was one of the best experiences of my life." said project participant Charles.

