

FROM *Whisper* TO VOICE



PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT



From Whisper to Voice Provided with financial assistance from



Between June 2021 and January 2022, Crave Arts delivered 'From Whisper to Voice', a project which aimed to:

- seek out unheard stories and talent from diverse voices
- provide support and showcasing opportunities for emerging writers/performers
- Build new audiences who engage and return
- Use artistic means to create new narratives of Worcester.

Originally planned as a larger Arts Council funded project, this smaller initiative was kindly granted funding by The Elmley Foundation, Worcester City Council and Worcester Theatres, through their Cultural Recovery Fund grant. Although operating on a quarter of the original budget, many of the original outcomes were still achieved, albeit on a smaller scale.

The project in numbers:

- 17 poetry, prose and theatre writing workshops held with 3 different community groups
- 39 writing workshop participants
- 11 plays performed to 90 live audience members at The Swan theatre (70 at the first performance, 20 at the second performance where numbers were limited due to Covid)
- 11 artists engaged (3 workshop facilitators, 6 actors, 1 emerging director, 1 photographer)
- 69 social media posts shared about the project to Crave Arts' 485 followers on Facebook and Twitter
- 10 social media posts shared about the project to Worcester Theatres' 9558 followers on Facebook and Twitter.



WRITING WORKSHOPS

Writing workshops were held with:

- the women's Joy Group, a support group for women who meet at Worcester Community Trust. Our artist was Holly Winter-Hughes. 13 participants attended.
- Eastern Europeans attending the LikeU Peace Centre in Lowesmoor. Our artist was Bohdan Piasecki. 12 participants attended.
- New to theatre-writing group (openly advertised). Our artist was Steve Wilson. 15 attended including 1 from Bohdan's group.

Holly and Bohdan have lived experience of the groups with whom they worked.

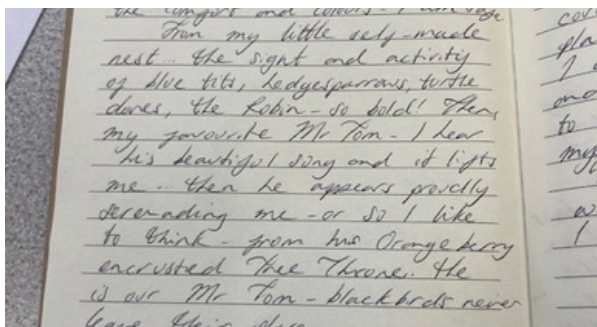
Subject matter ranged from the links between boxing and boredom, safe places, gratitude, dementia, revelations by a football pitch, a final New Year's eve, an Autumn day, an awkwardly placed tattoo and a child's heart transplant.



PERFORMANCES

We held two performances at the Swan Theatre, jointly with Worcester Theatres, attended by 90 people in total, putting on 11 plays by 10 writers. The first was a large event in the main house, the second was a smaller celebration event in the theatre foyer due to the spread of the Omicron variant, showcasing plays from the theatre-writers group and poetry and prose from the women's and Eastern European community groups.





GROWTH IN CONFIDENCE AND WELLBEING

All 3 groups were asked if the workshops developed their personal confidence and self-esteem. 90% of said yes.

Joy Group:

'Absolutely – I'm feeling much more confident'

'Yes, there were lots of interactions between the participants and Holly is a really patient person, encouraging everyone'

Eastern European Group:

'Absolutely'

New to Theatre Writing Group:

'Yes – during a very volatile period in my life when my self-esteem was shaken';

'Yes, I feel more able to talk out loud and offer my opinion'



IMPROVED ARTISTIC SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE TO WRITE

All 3 groups were asked if the workshops developed their creative writing confidence and gave them new artistic skills. 95% of respondents said yes.

Joy Group:

'these sessions have increased my field of vision'
'brilliant support and feedback'

Eastern European Group:

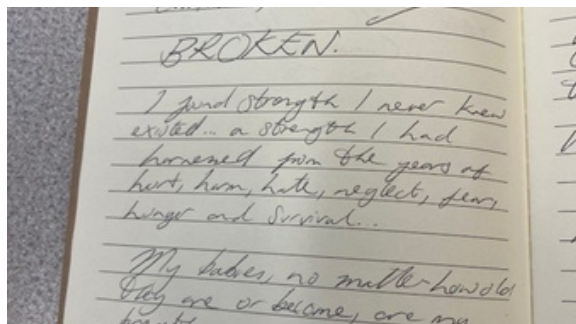
'I was very surprised with my abilities to write and express my thoughts, feelings, emotions through poetry'
'I've written my work to the point of completion'

New to Theatre Writing Group:

'I feel I have a better understanding of theatre'
'I'm noticing how flashbacks and scene shifting carries stories forward'
'I understand the importance of setting a lot more and how setting can act as another character'

The performance by actors of 11 plays produced by participants, and the readings of poetry, were a lovely way for participants to see their work brought to life, and many commented how this spurred them on to do more.

Finally, a comment from our emerging director: - *'My knowledge of directing and how to work with actors has been improved through this process. Really great opportunity and really enjoyed it. Would love to work as a director for Crave Arts again in the future.'*



OPPORTUNITIES AND PROGRESSION

We have started to plug a gap of providing supportive writing opportunities to Worcestershire people. We have developed their confidence to write as well as improving their self-esteem and wellbeing more generally. We also provided opportunities for 6 actors, including 2 emerging actors, and 1 person new to directing as part of the project.

The larger original project aimed to bring people from the various community groups to produce plays together by the end of the project, building community cohesion.

Although this project operated on only a quarter of that budget, we still managed to build the confidence of one Eastern European participant to then attend the follow-on play-writing workshops at The Swan, and Holly Winter-Hughes was able to encourage 3 people from her similar support groups to attend these play-writing workshops too, leading to a diverse group.

Indeed, one of the theatre-writing group participants said she was most proud of *'being part of such a diverse group'*.

Enabling this progression in a supported environment was something of which we are also proud – especially given the title of the project *'From Whisper to Voice'*.



OVERALL IMPACT AND APPETITE FOR MORE ARTS ENGAGEMENT

Overall impact can be summed up by quotes from the participants themselves:

Joy Group:

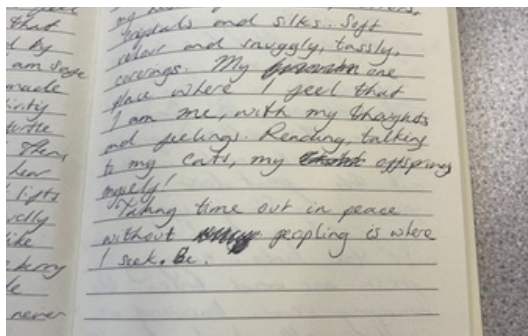
- *'I'm most proud of the feeling of connection with everybody around and learning together'*
- *'I'm most proud of how much I am getting off my chest'*
- *'It is brilliant for self expression, self esteem'*

Eastern European group:

- *'I'm most proud of a birthday poem for my daughter and a poem called 'Something''*

New to theatre-writing group:

- *'The positive feedback on my scripts has really helped me to believe in my writing'*
- *'This course has given me the confidence to join a West Midlands writing course on writing for radio plays. I have developed my writing by writing for and collaborating with artists in a local theatre group'*
- *'I think Steve is very generous with his time and the feedback he gives is very helpful and enabling.'*
- *'Getting out and meeting new people and thinking of myself as a writer, even if I'm not professional, is good for confidence and self-esteem.'*
- *'My confidence to write for performance has increased following positive feedback from Crave Arts and an overwhelming response from audience members following the show. I also feel that by expanding contacts through Crave Arts and Worcester Theatres, I am more part of the local arts community and have somewhere to go in the future with ideas'*



LEGACY

We have developed a legacy to the project. We are now an associate company of Worcester Theatres and in a joint initiative with them, we will launch reasonably priced writing and directing workshops in May to continue the writers' network that we have started to build.

This will provide further opportunities to grow the cultural offer, developing new talent leading to home-grown productions that can sit alongside the commercial offer at the theatre. Now that we have the links into the Joy Group and Eastern European Centre, we will promote these continuation opportunities to them.

We have also arranged to take further free creative workshops to the women's Joy Group as part of a National Lottery funded project to encourage writing and art about the subject of home, and we recently delivered two creative awareness raising workshops about loan sharks to them.



PROJECT BUDGET

The project budget was £11,272 with funding from The Elmley Foundation (£1,500), Worcester City Council (£1,200) and Worcester Theatres (£7,000).

£1,572 of this was in-kind support of staff time, marketing and some room hire. The Allen Lane £2,000 was sadly not granted but the Worcester Theatres grant made the project deliverable. By the end of the project, all funds had been spent except for £37.81 of the contingency. A breakdown of the expenditure can be provided if required.



LESSONS LEARNED

When bringing creative workshops to a new community venue and without an existing group, time is needed to really build up trust and buy-in. We did plenty of promotion in the local Polish community including translated marketing material but trust and interest took time to build and only after about 3 sessions did Bohdan's group take off.

Key to success was having facilitators with lived experience of the groups with whom they were working – Bohdan is a Polish speaker and Holly has much experience with women's groups herself. Another key to success was the support that Steve provided in-between workshops for his writers – something we will continue with the new writing course we will be bringing later this year. The performances were a lovely way to celebrate what people had achieved. The partnership with Worcester Theatres was a key to success of these performances and being able to offer the opportunities longer-term.