



## **Lung Ha Theatre Company**

### **EQUALITIES, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION**

#### **Development & Action Plan: 2016-17 (& going forward)**

**Lung Ha Theatre Company (LHTC) is a leading theatre company for performers with a learning disability, in Scotland and internationally.**

- The company applies the highest of professional standards to create, and then present, performing arts events of exceptional quality to a wide audience.**
- To provide opportunities for people with learning disabilities to develop a range of theatre skills.**
- To create opportunities for people to understand and explore their potential, and to push boundaries.**
- To provide a culture that is respectful and supportive.**

**At every stage, every level and in every aspect of its work Lung Ha Theatre Company considers access, accessibility, equalities and inclusion.**

## **Specific areas of work:**

### **1. DISABILITY**

The company hosts open auditions to join the performing team on an annual basis.

Auditionees are not required to have any previous acting or performance experience.

Auditions are promoted through Resource Centres, Local Area Network Coordinators, the company's website, social media and other outlets.

The audition is made up of a group workshop and supported interview - all auditionees must attend their workshop and interview with a family member or named support.

Performers must be 18 years or over - LHTC provides drama opportunities that, up to the age of 18 would typically be provided through the school system, but that thereafter people with a learning disability may find difficult to access.

All creative opportunities are made available to performers free of charge.

LHTC activities take place in fully accessible venues; LHTC places great consideration on safe transport access to the venues it uses. LHTC keeps a close eye on the amount, and length, of time taken over its activities to help ensure it does not overwork or overtire its performers. The company builds appropriate breaks and rest times into its working schedules.

LHTC provides a Volunteer and Professional Drama Support Team at all activities, to help ensure performers can give of their best in a safe and supported environment.

When scheduling performance times and venues LHTC ensures all venues are fully accessible and that performances are held on days and times that best suit the widest possible audience constituency to attend. Performance times and days selected can include a weekday matinee performance as this often works best for Adult Resource Centre users and can also provide a feeling of safety for those audience members who prefer not to travel after dark.

Performance pricing structures are set with a view to offering the widest range of affordable ticket prices as is possible - and that required one-to-one carers can attend performances free of charge.

Workshops are offered prior to performances - workshops are targeted toward people with a learning disability, and the focus of said workshops is to enhance the attendee's understanding of the production they are about to attend. Workshops also provide a "taster" session for prospective new LHTC performers.

Performances will be captioned, audio described and/or BSL sign language interpreted when and where possible - the objective is for at least one performance to be fully accessible.

Post-performance discussions will be held - all discussions will feature members of the LHTC performing team.

LHTC creates plays that are not proscribed i.e. the company does not commission a writer to tell a particular story. It (LHTC) allows its performing team to be actors, as opposed to being a

company that focuses on, and tells stories, about being a person with a learning disability - what might be seen as a more “political” organisation.

Where possible LHTC profiles its performers as the face and the image of the company. This includes production print, the company’s website, press interviews, online blogs, and post-performance discussions. The company is also producing more moving image and video that features members of the performing team.

LHTC has conducted work placements for performers as part of creating “pathways to work” opportunities - skills developed have included digital archiving and uploading to websites.

Should LHTC be making major strategic decisions, a process of consultancy across the entire organisation will be established - an example of which is the steering group of performers, which was established to advise and provide specialist expertise in support of LHTC’s rebranding work carried out in 2014.

The performers make up the entire LHTC membership at company Annual General Meetings - and thus vote for the election and resignation of members of the company’s Board of Directors.

Through the provision of high-quality theatre, workshops and other activities LHTC has the potential to break down barriers and to raise the expectations of the wider public as to what a person with a learning disability can achieve.

## **ACTIONS & OBJECTIVES:**

**(key actions & objectives for 2016-17 are emboldened):**

- **Provide the performers with skills development sessions focusing on the company's IT and communications systems; to enable the performers to use, interact, engage with and participate in LHTC's website, social media and other digital platforms. (1)**
- **To become a flagship organisation in working with people with a learning disability; to be an organisation that other organisations come to for guidance and support as to how to make their work and working practices more open and accessible. To involve performers in the creation and delivery of such work. (2)**
- **To explore further the possibility of LHTC establishing its own premises - a "home" premises would not only expand the range of work LHTC could become involved in, it would also provide a consistent and familiar space for the performers to use and one in which to feel safe and confident. Premises would also provide space, time and opportunities for performers to become more involved in areas other than solely performing; areas such as set building, prop making and lighting design for example could be incorporated as part of a wider theatre skills development programme. (3)**
- **To recruit a Board Member(s) with a background in Social Work and/or in the Support Services and to develop a pathway for LHTC performers to feed into, and to receive feedback from, the company's Board of Directors. (4)**
- **LHTC performers are unpaid - LHTC is committed to exploring whether this should and then will change. Payment for a service provided is a key element through which wider society demonstrates value and worth, thus the issue of payment is a critical one; LHTC will look to be a leader in these discussions. Discussions with agencies that oversee benefits such as the Disability Living Allowance will also be a key component of any forward decision. (5)**
- **To explore ways of effectively and clearly "evidencing" the wider positive outcomes that being a performer with LHTC affords - this will include looking at areas such as self-esteem, self-confidence, health and wellbeing, employability, team-working and independence; this work will also include looking to research the positive outcomes for audiences and others who come into contact with the company's work. (6)**
- **The company will audit its marketing and communications to ensure they reach out to, and engage with, as wide a constituency as is possible. (7)**

## **Other actions & objectives:**

- **Develop more workplace, work placement and pathways to work opportunities for people with a learning disability. To provide adequate support to enable the placement opportunity to be as effective as possible - both for the individual concerned and for the organisation as a whole.**
- **To look to commission playwrights and storytellers with a learning disability.**

- To support people with a learning disability to join LHTC's Board of Directors; and to ensure such appointments to the Board and/or other advisory bodies are fully, and effectively, supported.
- To work with more learning disabled performers; and to work in more varied ways - this may be in partnership with support agencies and other similar organisations, along with organisations such as the Royal Conservatoire Scotland, in the creation of skills based courses for performers with a learning disability. This may include "franchising" versions of LHTC across Scotland, or working with, and supporting, new and potentially like-minded organisations to be established.
- To involve people with a learning disability in every aspect of the company's work; from administration to production, from directing to prop making, from performing to writing.
- To be part of discussions and explorations as to longer-term equalities strategic thinking and planning; LHTC should be open to discussions such as should companies like it need to exist in the future? Do its performers, and future performers, have unique stories to tell and ways of performing that require companies such as LHTC to continue to exist? What does an open and accessible future look like for all stakeholders?
- Explore the provision of "relaxed" performances - "relaxed" performances provide an environment that can be more suited to people who are considered to be on the autism spectrum.
- To create partnerships with organisations that work with "harder to reach" groups and individuals - organisations such as support agencies and service providers for people with a disability.
- LHTC will find out more about its audience(s) and other stakeholders - who they are? Where do they come from? What do they think of the work of LHTC? Are companies like LHTC important? How did they hear about a particular performance? Their socio-economic background? Enabling more effective communications with said stakeholders and also enabling the company to learn, to grow and to develop.

## **2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION**

Lung Ha Theatre Company recognises that many of its performers, potential performers, audiences, performers' families and support teams may come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many performers will have limited access to longer-term education, to paid work (and further to well-paid work), and thus may receive financial and living support through the benefit system - and as such will invariably have very limited disposable incomes.

Thus the company provides a vital and affordable opportunity to be expressive, to be creative, to be artistic, to be valued and to perform to a group of people who may otherwise find such opportunities extremely difficult to access.

To support these objectives Lung Ha Theatre Company:

- Offers fully supported auditions, on an annual basis, open only to performers with a learning disability. Auditionees, in recognition of the fact that such opportunities may be difficult to access, are not required to have any previous acting or performance skills and/or drama training experience.
- Provides all of its opportunities free of charge to performers.
- Considers ease of access and safety of travel as part of decisions made in regard to audition, rehearsal, workshop and performance spaces used by the Company.
- When and where possible offers performers supported workplace, work placement and pathway to work opportunities.
- Ensures a range of discounted ticket prices is available at all performances - to encourage the widest possible audience constituency to attend, and participate, in its work. Attendees requiring one-to-one support will have their support worker(s) attend free of charge.
- Performs in key city-centre, and other, leading performance venues to afford its audience, some of whom may feel socially excluded from such places and experiences, the opportunity to attend the company's work in an environment suited to enable the production to be at its best.
- Provides appropriate transportation, for performers and support staff, when and where performances take place outside of Edinburgh.
- Provides catering over production and performance weeks.

## **ACTIONS & OBJECTIVES:**

**(key actions & objectives for 2016-17 are emboldened):**

- **Assess and analyse the possibility of performers being paid a salary for their work with LHTC. At present, spring 2016, the performers are not paid by LHTC - however as the level, and quality, of the creative work continues to rise the board and management of the organisation are aware that the issue of remuneration needs to be closely looked at. This work will also involve consultation with appropriate benefits and support agencies. (1)**
- **LHTC will ensure that its communications strategies and action plans reach out to and engage with vulnerable, and other hard to reach, groups. (2)**
- **LHTC will have a well-trained support team at all of its activities - a support team that understands, is empathetic, and is able to work positively and supportively with people who may come from a challenging background. (3)**

## **Other actions & objectives:**

- LHTC will seek to expand the number of people with learning disabilities that it works with and to expand the range of opportunities it affords. Providing more people with backgrounds that may be seen as derived the opportunity to be creative, to develop confidence in themselves, to express themselves and to share their stories.
- To develop a more structured work placement programme for people with a learning disability; to include office based skills development opportunities.

### **3. AGE**

LHTC works exclusively with performers with a learning disability who are over 18 years of age; however there is no upper age limit - indeed some of the company's performers have been with LHTC for over 30 years.

The lower age limit (which is permissible to join the LHTC performing team) is currently set at 18. The age limit is set at 18, as it would be anticipated that a provision for drama would be made through the school system up to this point. However after leaving school many performers with a learning disability will find ongoing (here people may use the word "mainstream") drama and performance opportunities difficult to access along with many other professional creative opportunities.

The Company has begun permitting performers aged 16+ (with appropriate one to one support only) to its workshop activities; this is with a view to developing performers to be able to join the full performing company after they have turned 18.

**ACTIONS & OBJECTIVES:**  
**(key Actions for 2016-17 are emboldened):**

- **The company will lead in the creation of new opportunities to develop creative and performance skills for adult performers - i.e. through the development of training courses with organisations such as the Royal Conservatoire Scotland, together with other workshop and outreach activity. (1)**

**Other actions & objectives:**

- LHTC will explore the creation of links with schools, such as Pilrig Park School and Kaimes School (both in Edinburgh), to offer workshops and other activities to pupils, and also to identify, support and develop future potential members of the LHTC performing team.
- LHTC will support the development of its performers to become role models and wider cultural leaders. To have performers attend applicable professional and peer events and to act as advocates both for themselves and for LHTC - and to lead such events and opportunities when and where possible. In recent years LHTC performers have taken a leading role in work with *The Judicial Institute for Scotland*, which has proved to be a very successful partnership for both organisations.

Whilst “age” may not be as direct or perhaps could be seen to be as directly important an area of equalities focus for LHTC particularly when looked at in comparison to disability or socio-economic deprivation - the company is aware that it provides an important and unique opportunity for adults with a learning disability. It provide an opportunity to be creative, to perform, to have their voices heard and even to be respected by wider society; thus such a unique provision and opportunity for adults with learning disabilities should not be undervalued; and, as such, is one that the organisation nurtures and of which it takes great care. The value of the provision for adults, who may otherwise find such opportunities very difficult to attain, can be seen by the number of performers LHTC has worked with over its lifetime, by the length of time many of the performers choose to remain with the company and by the ever-increasing number of people wishing to audition and to join the performing company on a regular basis.

Added to this, and through anecdotal evidence, some members of the LHTC performing team have highlighted that some creative opportunities they have been involved tend to focus on those under 30 years of age.

## **Key actions & objectives:**

## **Working schedule, responsibility, targets & measures of success:**

### **Disabilities:**

- (1) IT Skills Development:** throughout 2016-17 - led by the Creative Administrator
  - to have a performing team (up to 25 in size) that is engaged in, interacts with and contributes to, the company's communications systems.
  - the performers will be able to navigate the Company's website and social media platforms.
  - To have at least one performer deliver IT skills workshops to the other members of the performing team.
  
- (2) Flagship organisation:** throughout 2016-17 - led by the Artistic Director & Company Manager
  - to develop a skill-sharing workshop programme that LHTC delivers to other arts organisations, aimed at sharing knowledge and skills in work with performers with learning disabilities.
  - to involve performers in the delivery of workshops; to begin to make connections with other interested organisations.
  
- (3) Premises:** throughout 2016-17 - led by the Board and staff
  - to end the 2016-17 financial year with a working strategic document and plan.
  
- (4) Board Member:** Spring/summer 2016 - led by the Board of Directors
  - to recruit a Board Member from the required background: social work and/or support service and to establish pathway of communication from performers to the Board, and vice versa.
  
- (5) Remuneration for performers:** Summer/Autumn 2016 - led by the Company Manager
  - to have completed research into other organisations similar to Lung Ha Theatre Company and on that basis make a recommendation on remuneration to the Board.
  
- (6) Evidencing Positive Outcomes:** Led by all staff
  - to have a working plan and strategy as to how to demonstrate/evidence the wider positive impacts of LHTC's work on its performers and stakeholders.
  - to collect, analyse and present such data.

### **Socio-economic deprivation:**

- (1) Remuneration for performers:** Summer/Autumn 2016 - led by the Company Manager
  - to have completed research into other organisations similar to Lung Ha Theatre Company and on that basis make a recommendation to the Board.
  
- (2) Communications:** Spring to Autumn 2016 - led by the Creative Administrator
  - to contact and work with support agencies, and other relevant bodies, to research the most effective pathways to ensure LHTC's communications find the hardest to reach groups - and to then build this knowledge into LHTC's ongoing communications strategies and audience development plans.

- to work on the development of LHTC's communications strategy with a communications specialist.

**(3) Support Team:** Throughout 2016-17 - led by the Company Manager and Creative Administrator

- to ensure the Support Team understand and are best equipped to support the challenges that may arise through working with socially disadvantaged and/or excluded individuals.
- to have a training schedule in place for the support team - to include first aid, deaf awareness and to be drawn up in consultation with support agencies working with people with learning disabilities.

## **Age:**

**(1) Develop performance skills of adult performers:** Summer/Autumn 2016 - led by the Artistic Director

- LHTC will work with the Royal Conservatoire Scotland (RCS) as it develops a performance skills training course aimed at adults with a learning disability, (which commenced in the winter of 2016); with a view to assessing the success or otherwise of the initial course and thence with a view to developing and expanding said course; and to look at creating further opportunities.
- LHTC will work with the RCS to assess the level of success of the initial training course - Summer, 2016.

# **Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats**

## **Strengths:**

LHTC works with performers with a learning disability, and has done so for over thirty years.

The company has well-established support structures in place for performers with a learning disability.

The company is a specialist in its field and is therefore able to offer its skills, learnings and experience to other organisations.

Performers are experienced, talented, committed, professional, hard-working and genuine advocates for the organisation.

The company has a reputation for producing creative work of high quality; performance quality is an important tool in the quest to increase audience numbers. Quality work enables the company to reach out to, and work with, new creative partners.

## **Weaknesses:**

The company does not have a “home” rehearsal and training premises. Finding accessible rehearsal space, and for a large group, can be challenging. Consistency of venue is important to performers for reasons of safety and confidence.

The lack of a home space limits the number of performers with a learning disability the company is able to work with.

The company is, in large part, reliant on performance venues to collect equalities data from its audience members.

Awareness of equalities, diversity and inclusion, outside of learning disabilities, is not yet embedded throughout the organisation.

The company needs to undergo training, develop learnings, skills, plans and actions to implement the changes required to positively impact equalities.

## **Opportunities:**

Finding a “home” premises - this would enable the company to work with more learning disabled performers, and in more and different ways.

To become a leader and a centre of excellence in the field of learning disabled performance; to become an organisation that other organisations come to for advice

This document was created by the Lung Ha Theatre Company Manager working in consultation with the LHTC Board of Directors, permanent staff and supported by members of the performing company.

The company needs to undergo training, develop learnings, skills, plans and actions to implement the changes required to positively impact equalities.

The Company can better tell the progressive story of its work and its impact, particularly on people with, and attitudes to, learning disabilities.

## **Threats:**

LHTC is heavily dependent on public subsidy.

The vote to leave the European Union threatens income generation and partnership opportunities that are supported by the European Union.

Applications for public subsidy are continually oversubscribed and thus the process is highly competitive.

Another organisation could “do” what Lung Ha Theatre Company “does” better.