



HMP Barlinnie

&

Theatre NEMO

**March-2006
March-2007**

Project Report

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Enclosed

DVD of “AN ANONYMOUS POINT OF VIEW”

DVD of “ANIMAL FARM” + Participants Feedback / Comments

Audience Comments of Animal Farm

Project Description

First Ten Weeks

Skill Development

Referring back to our previous projects within Barlinnie we realised that most of our focus was on the creative process of writing and developing ideas and scripts for film or stage production, as the participants have always risen to this challenge through to exceeding expectations it was decided that there was room for more ambitious skill bases to be introduced to the workshops. The new skills involved a deeper exploration of character analysis, more complex script development that requires understanding of relationships and communication between characters and a more detailed look at physicality and how all these things are related.

This first ten week block had no end product; it was all about developing skills and having time to experiment with ideas with no pressure to produce something for an audience

Second Ten Weeks

Performance

In this block, for the first time, we started our journey towards a performance with a pre written script. We chose Animal Farm as it is full of social commentary that is as current today as the day it was written as well as being written in a format which lends itself to new material being added. Using this script allowed the cast to work on developing characters, interpreting meaning, work in close partnership and to create new writing of their own.

Third Ten Weeks

Short Film

We are currently delivering our last block of workshops for this year, the focus of which is to create a short film. The four main aspects of this are camera and editing operation, sound engineering, script writing and performance skills for camera.

Facilitators Feedback

“AN ANONYMOUS POINT OF VIEW”

At the beginning of 2006 we produced a short film with a group of participants entitled “An anonymous point of view”, approximately half of the group had been involved in the previous production of “Thoughts from within” in October 2005. Our workshop process is focused on group lead content being developed, meaning that the participants must develop their own ideas and make decisions as a group about what ideas to use and how best to present them, as workshop facilitators we try to broaden the groups ideas to include a wider audience and provide technical training and support.

On the first morning of this block we hit a major problem, one of the participants accidentally dropped the video camera on the concrete floor, through delays with insurance companies and repair time this meant the camera could not be used for this project. This misfortune proved to be a blessing in disguise, suddenly; facilitators and participants had to come up with a way to make a short film without a video camera.

The group decided that they could use computer programs and then went on to work hard to create computer generated image sequences and graphics to a level of complexity that, as a facilitator, I would not normally delve into, as it takes concentration and patience to achieve a desirable outcome. I believe that the end product speaks for itself, in terms of the level of commitment achieved by the participants I also think that the content they found and devised intelligently portrays points of view about the world in which we live.

“ANIMAL FARM”

This project was developed over twenty weeks, instead of the usual ten, as stated above the reason for this was to allow the participants time to develop drama skills for the first ten weeks before beginning work with the script in the second ten weeks.

Skills Developed

- Team building and the recognition of self and others within a group setting.
- Emotional and physical focus.
- Confidence and trust building in a group setting.
- Vocal awareness and the use of voice when addressing an audience.
- Body and spatial awareness in relation to physical expression.
- Creative thought processing and its use in the realization of artistic ideas and concepts of self and group.
- Abstract expression of emotion and its use as a dramatic device.
- Improvisation and its use in creating drama for stage.
- Creative writing for stage and the adaptation of existing script.
- Perception of and interaction with, a live audience.
- Character and role, creation and development of.

The group we had for the first ten weeks were very receptive to this process, they worked well as a team and learned quickly how to give and take constructive criticism without causing or taking offence, this may not sound like a noteworthy achievement, but for many of the people in the group positive communication was a new experience.

As the group gained confidence we introduced more challenging tasks, involving short scenes that they would direct themselves in small groups and then perform to the other groups. Other tasks involved us giving the group a short description of a scene which they would then develop into a short script. Building up these skills gave the group a strong foundation to move on to tackling a play.

Artistically the group were immensely successful in their aim of staging a production of ‘Animal Farm’. The final group who eventually took to the stage were a strong knitted cast of actors. Throughout the performance they remained strong in the portrayal of their characters, focus and energy were consistent, and the audience remained captured throughout.

With regards to utilising the arts as a medium for personal development these workshops have undoubtedly had a profound and positive impact on all who took part.

At the beginning of the project all of the participants exhibited mannerisms which conveyed low self esteem such as poor eye contact, poor physical posture, unclear and nervous expression etc, at the end of the project expression was markedly more relaxed and confident, eye contact was comfortable, conversation was warm and relaxed, assertion of self was a great deal more positive, empathy and understanding of others was heightened.

Of particular interest to us as workshop facilitators was the profound effect the workshop process had on one particular participant, at the beginning of the process Stuart suffered from a severe speech impediment which caused him to stutter to such an extent that it was very difficult for him to even tell us his name. Gradually throughout the twenty weeks his speech improved, I can only assume that this was due to Stuart feeling at ease with the group and using the time in rehearsals as a place to relax and focus on things other than personal issues, but having had no training in speech therapy we do not know the reason, we do know however that during the performance he didn't stutter once. Staff told us that before he attended Theatre Nemo sessions he did not leave his cell and was very uncooperative and very unhappy. Stuart was due for release the week after the performance and staff could not believe the change in his confidence and communication.

J.P. another young man that was in Animal Farm amazed the staff by his ability to focus. James had severe learning difficulties could not read or write and found it very difficult to communicate he was kind of shunned and left to himself. Before joining the group staff said his concentration span was about 10 seconds and yet he kept his focus throughout the production. The guardian newspaper wrote "Young James Frew walked a couple of inches taller when he walked out the dressing room after his performance of animal Farm"

Staff Feedback

Frank Gibbons (Health Centre Manager)

1. Sessions offer some of our prisoners an opportunity to work in a team. People who find it difficult to mix feel more confident because the groups are small and there is good supervision. Lots of activity in the prison involves large groups of 20 plus prisoners - playing football or going to the gym and even education has very high numbers.

2. You notice that some of the guys attending NEMO start to take a bit of pride in the fact that they are going along and it gives the traditional loner a small group of friends to talk to in the hall.
3. I do feel that the guys not only learn to express themselves in a non-aggressive manner but they also learn a bit about how they presented to other people in the past. Personal self-awareness or whatever you call being aware of your own image - certainly many of them admit that they had not realised that they were so aggressive in manner or negative etc.
4. The ones who attend Theatre NEMO become more confident and probably taking part in this creative environment provide a basic confidence that gives them the courage to go on and try certain things that they were perhaps anxious about in the past. Employment opportunities take a degree of social skills and for some of the guys NEMO are working with it will be the first opportunity for a long time to use and learn social skills. Even just having to wait until it is your turn to talk is a skill - I know this from some of the focus groups I hold in the halls - where people just shout over people.
5. I also think Hugh and Rikki are good role models as they are not connected with the prison and they are ordinary blokes and prisoners might not state that they are impressed by the guys but they do respect the two of them.
6. There is lots in the prison that is about 'treatment' or 'education' or 're-offending' - all are trying to drive a message through to prisoners who feel at saturation point with the latest Government trend... However, Theatre Nemo is creative and people learn without necessarily feeling the pressure of learning and they pick up a self awareness that was not being tapped by 'education and buzz words'. There is no pressure and no overarching morale utopia - the guys feel it is real and learn from their own experiences. I sometimes feel the prisoners are far more circumspect in their views (which are usually traditional victim and them and us). They start to reflect on their own ability and responsibility in all that has happened to them.
7. The activities are fun and 'fun' is a rare activity in the criminal justice system. Some of the people have not laughed for a while or relaxed.
8. I should mentioned the most powerful thing Theatre NEMO do. They let institutionalised staff of all grades and backgrounds see the potential of some of the men in their care and that is very powerful. Many staff believes that the prisoner group are not capable of positivity or creativity unless linked with negative activity. There is also an underlying belief that people with mental health issues must be 'daft'. The performances are very challenging and very powerful and it reminds everyone watching that we are dealing with ordinary people who are demonstrating that they have the potential to change. The frustrating bit is that SPS have not found a way to make changes in prisoner's long-term or everlasting but perhaps it will take society to make that change? However, showing that people have skills, capabilities, and feelings is very powerful in prison.

John McCaig, Prison Inspector (former Deputy Governor of Barlinnie)

(Referring to Animal Farm)

This once again has been a very powerful performance. The comments from such a diverse range of individuals are great testimony to all involved in the preparation and the performance of the production. It has never ceased to amaze me the heights that Theatre Nemo have been able to achieve since first coming into the prison. You have played a significant part in the amazing culture change which has happened in Barlinnie over the past few years. This performance has scaled new heights. Keep up the good work and keep challenging.