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# **Intersection**

## Final Evaluation

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# executive summary

## background

Intersection was the first initiative in Collective Encounters' new three year project, *State of the Nation*: a project which has grown out of three years of research in north Liverpool and which will address questions of identity, sense of community and nationhood. Throughout our research local people have expressed real concern about the dying nature of community spirit and a sense of distance between people and power; they have told us about their feelings of isolation and the conflict of interest between the needs of the individual and the needs of the community. *State of the Nation* will use theatre as a tool to explore and articulate who we are and how we live in the early years of the twenty first century, and will aim to enable marginalised and underrepresented groups to give voice to their experience. The project will provide a series of creative platforms where the underlying issues and causes of discontent can be examined and will offer the opportunity for people to explore their aspirations: how can we as individuals and as a society create a better, more integrated world for ourselves and our children.

State of the Nation will enable Collective Encounters to

- provide intensive, training and accreditation for over 60 young people and 40 older north Liverpool residents
- engage approximately 1,000 local people in workshops and creative consultation
- create 4 professional productions reaching a local audience of approximately 4,000
- create 7 new community productions reaching a local audience of over 2,000
- provide local and national platforms for marginalised groups to creatively explore & articulate their concerns

A key aspect of State of the Nation will be a youth theatre. This will be provided free of charge to all interested young people in north Liverpool between the ages of 13 – 19. It will be run on democratic principles and will enable young people to make work which accurately reflects and represents their life experiences. It will work towards social change by facilitating the group to perform their work not only to their peers, but also in contexts and to people that can make a difference.

## overview

Intersection was a professional production for young people which integrated a cast of three professional actors with two young women who had worked with the company on its (dis)connected project. The piece explored issues of democracy, citizenship and the challenges facing young people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through an interactive 60 minute performance. The show toured schools, community centres, exclusion projects and youth groups in north Liverpool for 3 weeks during March 2007, playing 16 performances to 350 audience members in 12 venues.

## management and staffing

To deliver Intersection Collective Encounters employed a director, a designer, a composer, three professional actors, two young actors, and a stage manager. The piece was produced and creatively supported by the company's Artistic Director and administrative support was provided by the company's Projects Coordinator (jointly managed by the

Artistic and Administrative directors). The budgets were set by the Artistic/Administrative Directors and were approved by Collective Encounters' Board.

# aims and objectives

## aims of **intersection**:

- Create a professional theatre for social change production which fully integrates a professional and non-professional cast and provides a high quality theatre experience for young people in north Liverpool
- Explore issues around democracy, citizenship and the challenges confronting young people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- Provide a bridge between (dis)connected and State of the Nation
- Be a recruitment tool for the youth theatre

successful: ✓      partially successful: ♦      unsuccessful: ✘

Goal 1	Facilitate an experimental devising process in order to create new work	Objectives	i. Employ an appropriate professional team	✓
			ii. Integrate young participants effectively into the cast	✓
			iii. Effectively explore the key issues	✓
			iv. Experiment with theatrical style and models of theatre for social change	✓
			v. Ensure that the piece is specifically geared towards its target audience	✓
Goal 2	Produce a high quality professional production which engages its audience in the action	Objectives	i. Ensure the piece accurately reflects the company's ethos and the issues at the heart of State of the Nation	✓
			ii. Ensure the piece explores the issues at the heart of State of the Nation	✓
			iii. Work with new artists and develop new professional collaborations	✓
			iv. Use mechanisms to directly engage the audience in the action	♦
Goal 3	Raise the profile of the company amongst a wide range of young people in north Liverpool	Objectives	i. Give 20 performances	♦
			ii. Play to up to 700 young people	♦
			iii. Play in a wide range of venues including schools, youth clubs and exclusion projects	✓
			iv. Work in new contexts and build relationships with new community based groups and organisations	✓
			v. Generate interest in the youth theatre and collect information about potential participants for the database	✓
Goal 4	Offer an advanced theatre experience for young (dis)connected participants	Objectives	i. Provide a safe, collaborative working environment	✓
			ii. Facilitate young participants to significantly enhance their theatre skills	✓
			iii. Provide OCN accreditation	✘
			iv. Enhance young participants confidence, team work, and inter-personal skills	✓
			v. Offer support and guidance in relation to future choices and pathways	✓

# evaluation

## contributors

This evaluation document has been produced collaboratively by Collective Encounters Artistic Director and Projects Coordinator. It has drawn on evaluative feedback formally gathered from Intersection's director, cast and stage manager, and the company's Administrative Director.

## creative team

The intention behind the project was to recruit a professional team to support a fully integrated professional and non-professional cast. Collective Encounters set out to forge new creative relationships with artists from the region as well as build on some existing relationships. The post of director was advertised locally and regionally and following a formal interview process involving four short listed candidates, Nick Birkenshaw was appointed. Pete Jones had worked with the company on (dis)connected and was invited back as composer on this project. Collective Encounters' Artistic Director identified and met with several designers and selected Rowan Watts; a similar process was used to recruit Laura Cockett as Stage Manager. Local and regional agents were contacted to propose potential actors for the piece, and the Artistic Director made contact directly with several professional actors she felt would be suitable. Auditions were conducted by both the Artistic Director and Nick Birkenshaw and following discussions the team of three professional actors was cast. Julie Walker and Joe Shipman were both new to working with Collective Encounters; Paul Robinson had worked with the company in a voluntary capacity previously, performing in The Harmony Suite. In keeping with its aim of supporting emerging professionals and recent graduates, the company was very pleased to be able to offer a paying acting contract to Paul. All contracts were based on ITC/Equity guidelines and rates.

All the young participants from (dis)connected were contacted and invited to participate in Intersection. As many of them had progressed into full time education or had other commitments, however, only two were available to fully participate in this process. Pip Goodwin and Kayleigh Jessop were consequently full members of the creative team and were paid accordingly. In order to secure the involvement of other (dis)connected participants the project was timed to have the first rehearsal week coinciding with half term. This meant that a further three young people participated in the early devising stages and contributed significantly to the development of ideas which fed into the final piece. These participants were paid to cover expenses.

## devising process

This four week process was led by Intersection's director with regular structured input from the Artistic Director. It began in a very open manner since the company was determined that the subject matter and key themes should emerge from the participating young people. Consequently they were given a framework and an understanding of State of the Nation and where their piece would sit in the wider project; but they identified the key issues and themes themselves. Alongside this exploration of subject matter was experimentation with theatrical form. The director introduced possible models of theatre for social change and a range of theatrical styles; and the creative team examined wider popular cultural forms (including TV and music culture). The first week was extremely fruitful and led to key decisions being made about form and content.

There was some feeling amongst the cast that a little too much time was spent discussing the work and that it could have been more creatively spent in physically exploring ideas; but other feedback suggested a more positive balance between discussion and practical work:

*"It has been an enjoyable, invaluable experience. It was really well balanced between experiences and knowledge of youth culture and issues."*

The creative team resoundingly appreciated the four week rehearsal period and fed back that it had been the right amount of time to create the work.

The integration of professionals and non-professionals was a real success. One of the young actors explained:

*"It wasn't what I expected. I thought the professionals would look down at us but they never - they were really lovely people to work with...I loved it so much I didn't want it to end!"*

Similar positive feedback was given by the three young people who participated in the first week: they said that it had been "exciting", that they'd enjoyed working with the professional actors and director, and that they wished they could have stayed to act in the final piece. The professional actors were also very positive about the integrated cast: one explained:

*"It's been great! Having the mix has really helped with the project for me."*

And the director of the piece commented:

*"The idea of an extended group in week one was very sound, giving us an opportunity to make sure that the issues we worked with were of interest and relevance to the target audience. Working with a combination of experienced and less experienced people made for a good mix of focused application and excitement."*

Finally, the stage manager commented:

*"This has been a great experience, The different energy and perspective brought to the process by the young performers was very beneficial and, I believe, helped ground the work."*

The only area in which the process did not live up to expectations was in that the company had hoped to accredit the two young actors for their work on the project. Collective Encounters is a registered centre for learning for the Open College Network and is able to offer OCN accreditation to participants on its programmes of work. The two young women in question, however, had already achieved all the relevant OCN qualifications (some through previous educational programmes and some through work with Collective Encounters on its (dis)connected programme) and so we were unable to offer them anything new. The young actors did not perceive this as a problem, but the company would have liked to have been able to offer the 'added value' of accreditation.

## the show

Out of the devising process grew a 60 minute interactive piece of drama. It told the story of a young woman tragically killed in a car crash while on a night out with friends. Drawing on game show and televised trial formats, the audience was challenged to explore blame culture and personal responsibilities. The characters and situations were very familiar to our young audience: a single mum who's desire for a life of her own occasionally conflicts with her daughters need for stability; a young man angry that because he chooses to wear a hoodie he is branded a thug; a cab driver more preoccupied with issues of race than careful driving; a young woman who's main aspiration in life is to become a footballers wife. Without becoming an issue based play, it touched on important subjects such as drug/alcohol misuse, racism, relationships, ambition and disaffection. Its high energy, fast paced style captured audiences from the off, and ensured that they participated fully in discussions and interactive moments.

It was very well received by our young audiences: one audience member commented on how realistic she had found the themes in the piece and when asked to explain further said *"it was the only piece of theatre I've seen that's like my life"*. Another commented, more colloquially, *"...Yeah, it was really good...it had loads of pzztt and zizz and wasn't all laa laa daa daa..."*. Many of our audiences were new to theatre, but engaged fully in the experience and gave very positive feedback. *"That was boss. Can you come in here again? People never bring things into here"*

Youth workers and teachers had a similarly positive response to the show, commenting that it raised lots of ideas for them to work with subsequently and was a stimulant for discussion and debate. *"It was great; you had lots of different issues so everyone in the audience could associate themselves with one of the characters"*

*"I've never seen that concept being used to bring out issues with young people before, it worked!"*

*"I'm made up with it. See that lad there; he never sits in for anything so I'm amazed that he stayed for the whole show, that's amazing progress. Well done."*

## the tour

As a recruitment tool and a vehicle for raising the profile of Collective Encounters amongst young people in north Liverpool the company was keen to tour the piece to a wide range of venues. We aimed to build on our existing relationships with community partners and extend this base. We hoped to achieve 20 performances and play to approximately 700 young people. While the company does not see itself as having a particular remit to work in schools, and is more interested in working in non-formal and outreach settings, in order to reach a large number of young people we were interested in performing in schools on this occasion. Consequently we approached all the schools in north Liverpool as well as a wide range of youth clubs, community centres and exclusion projects. In order to reach as many people as possible the show was offered to venues at only £150 (negotiable for organisations with very small budgets). The tour was built and managed by the company's Projects Coordinator, managed by the Administrative Director.

The usual difficulties in making contact with the right person, firming up dates and ensuring audience numbers were experienced for most of the venues; but in particular the schools proved difficult to organize. This was mainly due to timetabling issues and confusion around the target subject. Intersection was dealing with issues of democracy and citizenship so it was applicable to PHSE and Citizenship modules as well as drama and performing arts. As there are tight budgets and timetables in schools it was increasing difficult to get the school to confirm which department would be interested and then to be able to form regular contact with that department to arrange dates and times. Although community groups who saw the performance commented positively on the diversity of the content it appears that schools need a much simpler and direct link to a specific subject in order to be able to release budgets and organize students. These difficulties are widely experience and documented by theatre companies working in schools contexts. Nevertheless, we did play in 6 venues that we had not had prior relationships with and achieved 14 performances in 13 venues in total.

Existing relationship with these venues	Number of performances	New relationship with these venues	Number of performances
Rice Lane City Farm	1	Key Stage 3 Centre (exclusion project)	1
Shrewsbury House	1	Key Stage 4 Centre (exclusion project)	1
Vauxhall Neighborhood	1	Community Justice Centre	1

Centre			
Kirkdale Neighborhood Centre	1	The Alima Centre	1
Croxteth Comuniversity	1	Hillside High School	2
Breckfield & North Everton Centre (BNEC)	1	Walton Youth Project	1
Marybone Youth and Community Centre	1		

The show was promoted to venues as being able to accommodate 60 young people per performance (meaning we could have accommodated an audience of 960). Because we were working through the venues, however, we were unable to promote the piece directly to young people themselves and had to rely on the venues to arrange the audiences. Numbers at performances varied greatly and in non-school settings were rarely more than 30 per performance. Intersection did, however, reach 350 young people with very little access to theatre performance and was extremely well received by them.

## recruitment

Collective Encounters produced a new State of the Nation flyer outlining opportunities for participation which was distributed to all audiences and included contact details (including a mobile number for texts). An announcement was made at the end of each show giving details of the youth theatre and inviting interested people to leave their contact details. At the time of writing the company is in the process of following this up and will be holding taster workshops later this month (May 07) to be followed by the youth theatre commencing weekly workshops at the end of the month. Consequently it is difficult to say at this point how many audience members will become youth theatre participants, but **77** young people gave their contact details as interested in finding out more (????% of the total audience).

## management

This was Collective Encounters first professional production to be produced rather than directed by the Artistic Director and was a valuable learning opportunity for the company. While the Artistic Director was extremely happy with the creative team and their work, the process of putting the team in place was later than ideal. This was a result of having to wait for funding decisions to be finalized in order to draw up budgets and appoint accordingly. Once the team was in place, however, it worked very well. The Artistic Director had creative meetings with all members of the team in advance of rehearsals starting. In these meetings she apprised team members of the company's work, its ethos and aspirations. She supplied documentation, where it would be helpful, and aimed to give a clear sense of what was wanted from the project. More intensive meetings were held with the director, in which the Artistic Director laid out very clear aims and objectives for the project, provided a great deal of background information on State of the Nation more widely, and enjoyed animated discussions about the kind of theatre both were interested in making. The Artistic Director entered into rehearsals at regular points throughout the four week period, offering general feedback to the team and more focused feedback in private to the director. She attended final and dress rehearsals, the preview and several of the final performances.

The Projects Coordinator provided administrative support and day-to-day management for the project, supported by the Administrative and Artistic Directors. She organized contracts, coordinated finances, secured the young people's participation, booked and managed the tour and liaised with the stage manager to ensure successful running of the project. Having worked with the participant group on (dis)connected, she provided valuable input and regularly attended open rehearsals and performances.

The project ran extremely smoothly and the creative team offered very positive feedback on its management. Comments included:

*"I really enjoyed working on the project. It was a very rare luxury to be able, as director, to concentrate 100% on making the show, without having to concern myself with finance, print and marketing, touring logistics and venue liaison, and all the other requirements of a project of this nature. Top team!"* (director)

*"Working for collective encounters has been a pleasure, there has been a great balance between professionalism and their supportive and friendly attitude and practice."* (actor)

Anything from Laura???

*"Collective Encounters have been a welcoming and open company to work for. I think the rehearsal process and why people gain from it is important. Whilst the end product is the focus I believe that not only can a dynamic process produce great results but also, if Collective Encounters is developing young people, that quality of the process can be more important."*

## recommendations

Intersection was a very successful project which achieved almost all of its aims, goals and objectives. It was also a valuable learning opportunity for the company, and following are some recommendations which should inform our future work.

can you work your suggested improvements into recommendations please and add any others you have

- project audience figures more realistically based on the experience we have now accrued of touring work in north Liverpool
- explore accreditation options beyond the OCN
- Stage manager to visit all venues prior to the tour commencing to gather information about access and performance space etc.
- If touring into schools again be more specific to one subject area to try and ensure more bookings.