

# From Where I'm Standing

## Evaluation Report



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## Summary

- **Impact – skills development**
  - Significant impact on levels of confidence, communication skills, creativity, co-ordination and physical fitness of the participating young people, eg over 80% of secondary school participants rated themselves as 'high' or 'very high' for confidence, communication skills and creativity by the end of the project - as opposed to only 30% at the start.
- **A 'safe space' for young people**
  - Successfully provided a 'safe space' where children and young people could explore issues that were troubling to them – and look at options for resolving and avoiding these issues in future. Issues explored included family members serving in Afghanistan, teenage pregnancy, fears about moving to secondary school and family problems.
- **Added value from partnership working**
  - Great added value gained from partnership working between Extended Services, Icon Theatre, Loop Dance Company and the six participating schools
  - Excellent communication between the delivery partners and effective joint project management.
- **Legacy**
  - Individual children more likely to take part in arts projects and activities in the future
  - Schools more likely to take part in similar projects in the future
  - Raised awareness of ongoing opportunities for participation in the arts in Medway

*'We all did great listening, by listening to each other ideas but we couldn't have been that good without all the help. I enjoyed working together but most of all I enjoyed performing on stage. It was a fantastic experience.'*

Yr 7 Participant Evaluation Response, Howard School.

## Project aims and methods

### Aims

The *From Where I'm Standing* project aimed to:

- develop confidence, communication skills, co-ordination and physical fitness as well as dance and theatre skills in 144 participating Medway children and young people
- introduce dance and drama activities in a fun and supportive environment, as well as raising awareness of the ongoing opportunities for participation in the arts in Medway
- provide a 'safe space' where children and young people could voice and explore issues that were troubling to them, and look at options for resolving and avoiding these issues in future
- deliver a large-scale project through effective partnership working, bringing together six primary and secondary schools, the Medway Council Extended Services team and Loop Dance Company and Icon Theatre (two creative companies based at the Brook Theatre).

*'I think this was an excellent project, an innovative way of developing children's knowledge and ability. [It...] promoted team building, confidence and physical activity in a dynamic environment'.*

- Parent, St Thomas More Primary School

### Project Outline

The project worked with six schools (Howard School, Hundred of Hoo, St John Fisher, St Thomas More, Temple Mill and Twydall Junior) over 15 weeks. Each school chose a dance or drama specialism, and facilitators from the creative companies delivered 10 weekly sessions on each school premises, along with an introductory session, technical and dress rehearsal and final performance held at the Brook Theatre.

Using the broad thematic title - '*From Where I'm Standing*' - as inspiration, the content of the final performance was entirely created by the participants, allowing them the opportunity of exploring issues that were important to them, and allowing the students real ownership over the show.

The final performance at the Brook Theatre allowed parents and family members the opportunity to enjoy the public recognition of their child's achievements and proved very popular - the performance sold out the Brook Theatre (430 seats) and was attended by the Deputy Mayor and Mayoress.

*What did you enjoy most about the project?*

*The fact that we got write the scripts.*

Yr 7 Participant Evaluation Response, Howard School

## Evaluation methods

We tracked the evaluation of this project in several different ways.

We measured the impact on 'soft skills' development (such as confidence, communication, co-ordination and physical fitness) with self-assessment evaluation forms, where each participant recorded their self-assessed score for their 'soft skills' abilities at the beginning and end of the project. These forms also allowed space for individuals to record broader and unexpected outcomes that they felt were important.

We also recorded spoken interviews with the participants, to allow those who were happier speaking than writing to voice their experiences of the project.

Facilitators took notes on each session and recorded weekly progress of individuals, as well as liaising with teachers to record achievements that were significant milestones for individual participants.

We held informal review sessions with each participating group of students, where we asked how the group thought the project was going, and how it could be improved. We also held informal review sessions between the partnership bodies delivering the project, in order to identify any developing issues before they caused difficulties on the project.

After the final performance, as well as the evaluation forms completed by the performers themselves, we also asked parents and staff to complete evaluation forms and give informal feedback to staff members.

*PT had displayed significant behavioural problems at school in the previous six months, and had been excluded for a short periods during this time.*

*Although he did not have a large role in his drama project initially, PT jumped into a position of responsibility when the star of his show broke a bone on the day of the performance. PT stepped into the role, and managed to learn all of the lines in under 5 hours, saving the situation for the whole cast. He earned a good deal of praise for his hard work by the teaching staff and respect from his peers, both - for him - an unusual occurrence.*

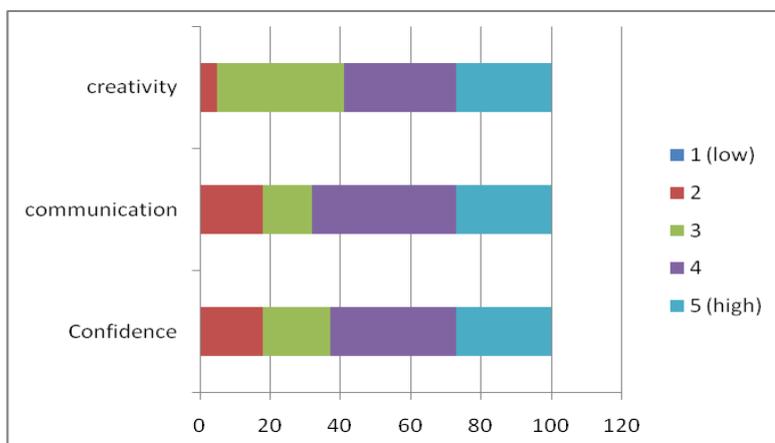
*At the end of the project he rated himself 5 out of 5 for confidence, communication and creativity (having rated himself 3, 4, and 2 at the beginning).*

*What did he most enjoy about the project? 'Everything 😊' he said.*

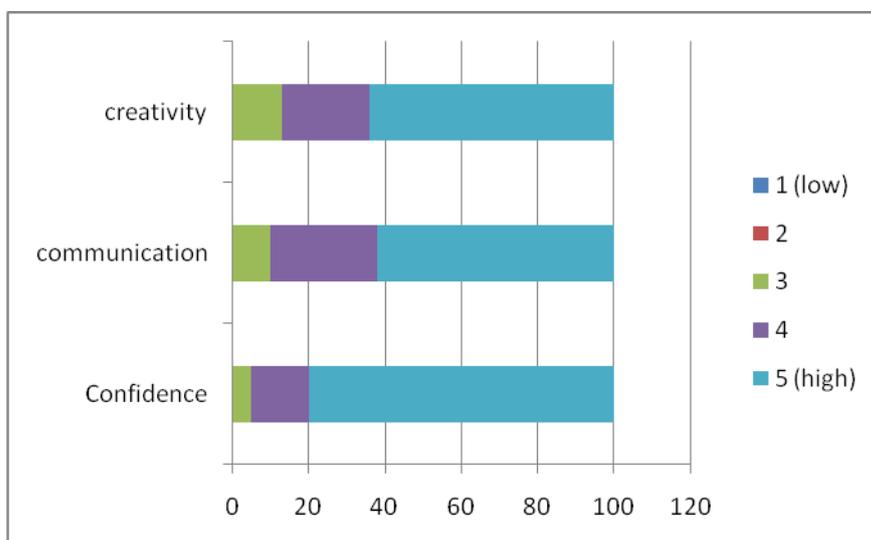
## Outcomes and impact

### Impact

At the start of the project participants specialising in drama completed questionnaires where they were asked to rate themselves 1 – 5 for their creativity, communication skills and confidence levels (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest). The bar chart below shows the percentages of participants that rated themselves against each number. While nobody rated themselves at the lowest level, there are some level 2's and the 3's, 4's and 5's are fairly evenly spread.



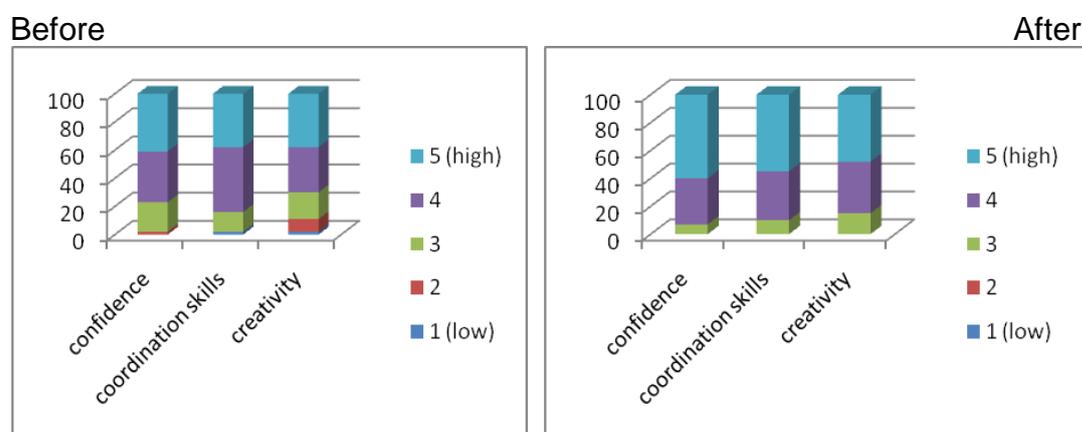
At the end of the project the young people completed a similar questionnaire. The bar chart below shows that by the end of the project nobody rated themselves level 2 in any of the categories and there is a significant increase in the percentage of students that rated themselves the highest level (level 5) for their creativity, communication skills and confidence levels. Over 80% of secondary school participants rated themselves high or very high for all three categories by the end of the drama strand of the project.



*It was fantastic it's really boosted my confidence loads!!*  
Yr 7 Participant Evaluation Response, St John Fisher

Dance participants were given a similar questionnaire at the beginning and end of the project. The children were asked to rate themselves 1 – 5 for each of the categories and were also asked about their physical fitness at the beginning and end of the project .

The two charts below illustrate the percentages of children that rated themselves against each number before and after the project. They clearly show an increase in confidence, co-ordination and creativity as a result of the dance strand of the project.



When the primary school children were asked about their physical fitness, 71% said they felt they had ‘excellent’ fitness and did not ‘get out of breath’ easily, only 9% felt their physical fitness was level 3 or below. The dance facilitators teaching on the project stated that there was ‘a noticeable increase in all students confidence levels, coordination and physical fitness by the end of the project’.

*I was quiet in school - now I won't shut up!*  
Year 6 Participant Evaluation Response, St Thomas More School

### Exploring issues - a ‘safe space’ for young people

One of the main aims of this project was to provide a ‘safe space’ where children and young people could explore interests or issues that were of concern to them, and work through possible solutions or ways to avoid these issues in the future.

In both dance and drama sessions, facilitators began the process with brainstorming sessions, allowing young people to voice exactly what was on

their minds. This brought up a wide range of subject matter, from global warming to family troubles to the price of school meals!

For some young people this was a particularly important part of the project.

*One participant was struggling with the fact that his father was currently serving in Afghanistan.*

*During the workshops, he was able to work with his peers to explore these issues – not just his fear of his father’s death but also his worries about the gap in closeness that he felt would happen as a result of the separation. This became the basis for the Howard School play ‘Leaving’.*

*During the course of this play, this participant directed that the ‘son’ character in the play should resolve some of his fears through a direct - if painful - conversation with the ‘father’ character, which appeared to be a therapeutic and positive experience for this young person.*

*‘I feel better about my Dad being away’ said the participant at the end of the project. ‘I’m not sure why, but I think about it a bit differently now.’*

Similarly, following a teenage friend of some of the participants in the Hundred of Hoo group becoming pregnant, many of the young people at Hundred of Hoo were concerned about teenage pregnancy – the causes and effects, both long and short term, and the impact this could have on future career and family choices. They were also interested in how the media portrayed the issue, and how the reality of teenage pregnancy was often very different. At the end of the project, one student remarked to the facilitator, ‘I thought having a baby might not be such a bad idea – no exams, no work and no worries! But now I’ve realised what it would do to my life and I’m going to make sure it doesn’t happen to me’.

### **Contribution to the ‘Healthy Schools’ initiative**

The project also complimented the Medway Healthy Schools Programme by:

- supporting children and young people to develop healthy behaviour
- helping to promote social inclusion through teamwork and working with other community groups
- encouraging good emotional health and wellbeing by addressing particular topics and themes in a safe environment
- increasing the amount of physical activity young people take part in
- increasing young peoples’ knowledge of a healthy lifestyle through dance warm-ups and creative sessions.

## Delivery

### Management

The project was jointly managed by Marie Forbes (Loop Dance Company), Nancy Hirst (Icon Theatre), and Jessica Pilcher (Medway Council Extended Services Cluster Co-ordinator).

Given the number of schools involved and the overall scale of this project, there were worries that the delivery could be logistically complex. However, all sides felt they worked well together and that the project was delivered efficiently and effectively.

However, there were some early tensions in the initial setting up of the project with schools – school staff seemed worried on initial meetings about timescales and the logistics of the project, but once the plan was mapped out and agreed by all sides there were few tensions - if any - after this. The planning and agreement process with the schools was completed only a few weeks before the beginning of the project, which contributed to the tension surrounding these issues, so earlier completion of this phase could be beneficial in the planning of future projects.

There were also unexpected issues with the transport logistics, as there had been some confusion in the planning stage as to whether schools would be providing their own transport, again this issue should be addressed earlier and budgets should be allocated in any future project plans.

### Communication

Communication between the management partners was very good, and regular review meetings throughout the project helped immensely.

One area for improvement is perhaps communication with parents. Although letters were sent out and signed permission slips received at the start of the project, several parents still seemed unsure about days and times as the performance date grew closer, and when planning future projects, reminder letters with these details sent several times over the course of the project would also have been useful.

### Press and Marketing

On this project, we also worked with the Medway Council Communications Team, who were responsible for PR for the project. The joint managers felt that good coverage in the local press was important as a way of marking the significance of the occasion for young people, enabling their achievements to

be recognised by a wider audience, and highlighting the role Extended Services and the Council had played in supporting the project.

After a slow start by the marketing team, good local coverage was gained, with three local papers - *Medway Messenger* (which has the highest readership of all paid for titles in Medway) *KM Extra* and *Your Medway* – all covering the event with a large picture story. The coverage was positive and highlighted the achievements of the young people.

However we were disappointed that the coverage did not include details of the role and support given by Extended Services, and for any planning of future projects, this coverage issue needs to be addressed as far as possible, perhaps with a greater role for local radio interviews, where content can be more directly controlled.

### **Value of partnership working with extended services**

The managers from Icon Theatre and Loop Dance both found great added value had been gained by working with Extended Services to deliver this project. It would have been extremely difficult for the creative company managers to manage communications and liaise with six separate schools during the course of the project, and having the Extended Services Cluster Co-ordinator and her team really improved the efficiency and effectiveness of the project, and greatly increased the numbers of children and schools whom we could involve.

It was also an extremely positive experience to have an arts education project fully resourced and supported from the outset. By having the support of Extended Services from so early on and with their genuine commitment to partnership working throughout, we were able to deliver what we felt was a truly effective and high quality arts project that will have long lasting positive outcomes on the children who took part.

*What did you enjoy most about the project?  
The teamwork and the fact we created it ourselves.  
Yr 6 Participant Evaluation Response, Temple Mill Primary.*

## Legacy

### Legacy for participants and partners

- **Film of the final performance given to each school**

The final performance was filmed, and copies of film given to each participating school, for use in Ofsted inspections and as a legacy of the project for the school, parents and participants.

The film is particularly important for schools such as the Hundred of Hoo, where they used the final performance as part of the assessed syllabus for the Performing Arts BTEC Diploma that many of the participants were working towards.

- **Raised awareness of ongoing opportunities for participation in the arts in Medway**

Although it was difficult to record the exact numbers of young people going on to attend other regular arts activities in Medway after the project had finished, information was disseminated by facilitators telling participants verbally about other regular events and encouraging individuals to keep developing their skills, and sharing information with teaching staff for later reference.

The programme also contained up to date details about a range of other local dance and drama activities that regularly took place, and over 430 copies of the programme were distributed and taken away by audience members.

*HJ was one of the young dancers from Twydall Junior School. After several weekly dance sessions the two facilitators reported back to Loop Dance Company that his 'enthusiasm, creativity and commitment to the project was outstanding'.*

*After the project, Loop Dance Company was approached by HJ's father by email: 'My son, has recently taken part in the "From where I'm standing" project. During his time rehearsing for this project, he was paid some compliments by [the facilitators who] told Henry a few times that he was "a very talented boy". Henry has taken great enthusiasm from his time during the production, and wants to learn more, and do more. With this in mind we are applying for a governors place at our local school, The Robert Napier School, who specialise in drama and dance, as this would be ideal for him.'*

*On receiving the email Loop Dance Company wrote a reference for Henry to support his application and since have invited him to join the LoopEd Youth Dance Company. Henry was also spotted by the press and his photograph featured on the double page spread in the Kent Messenger.*

There were some quite significant developments for individual children who went on to involve the arts more regularly in their lives, in particular HJ (see case study above). 5 children are now regular participants at the Brook Theatre Youth Theatre, and 6 participants went on to audition and be accepted into the prestigious LoopEd Youth Dance Company.

From these figures and feedback from other providers whose activities were listed in the programme, we would estimate that between 7 - 10% of participants went on immediately to join regular ongoing activities as a result of participation in the project, and we think this figure will probably rise further in the longer term.

*I'm more confident now, Huray! (sic)*  
Year 9 Participant Evaluation Response, Hundred of Hoo

- **Schools interested in taking part in similar projects in the future**  
From informal feedback given to facilitators and creative company staff at the end of the project, school staff had a very positive reaction to the project, and were very interested in continuing with more arts projects in future. For some of these staff, including some head teachers (some of whose initial reactions to the planning of the project had been significant concern about logistics and time impact) this represents a very positive development which will make it much easier for them to respond positively to other potential arts projects and as a consequence for arts activities to increase at their school in general.
  
- **Individual children more likely to take part in arts projects in the future**  
From verbal feedback and the written comments on the evaluation forms, most of the participants who took part felt that this project raised their confidence, dance and drama skills, and that it was something they enjoyed doing very much. One student, for whom it was his first experience of a performing arts project, was asked what skills he thought he'd gained from the project. 'Confidence and voice projection,' he said. 'It was completely brilliant'.

These students have had an extremely positive first introduction to the performing arts, and as a result are much more to get involved again and to make the performing arts a regular part of their recreation time in the future.

*What did you enjoy least about the project? 'It finishing'.*  
Year 6 Participant Evaluation Response, Twydall Junior

## **Opportunities for future improvements**

Although overall we have been extremely pleased with the outcomes and delivery of this project, there are - as always – some things we would improve if we were planning a similar project in the future:

- create training opportunities for staff outside of the normal school hours (possibly as INSET days) and at an early stage in the planning of the project, giving staff the opportunity to have more input/ownership over the project and for them to embed learning on the facilitation/delivery techniques
- increase opportunities for technical learning for both children and staff, and organise the technical events and training at an earlier stage in the project
- ensure press understood the primary importance of the extended services role in delivery and set-up of the project and make sure some coverage is gained where we have greater control over the editorial
- work with teaching staff to improve take up of mentoring/ assistant facilitation by older students, possibly combining with opportunities for accredited learning, eg arts awards
- improve communications with parents by repeated 'reminder' letters of dates and times of project.

## Case studies

### DG

At the start of the project, DG had been in England for less than six months. Although her written English language was beginning to improve, DG had a strong Slovak accent and as a result had difficulty in being understood when speaking. Embarrassed by her accent, she was very silent in class and withdrew from interactions with her peers. She had few friends within her year group and was thought to have a possible learning difficulty.

During this project, DG created her own character - a school teacher. She wrote her own lines and her schoolteacher character emerged as articulate, dictatorial and even bossy! When rehearsing, DG struggled with the pronunciation and had to repeat the lines many times. However, because of the humour of the bossy schoolteacher character, the rest of the group were extremely encouraging, going as far as to help her outside of the sessions and praising her when she got it right and the character came alive.

Not only did this project help her to improve her accent and the clarity of her spoken English, but the support and acceptance of her classmates has given her much greater confidence in speaking English in general. Her form teacher reported that by the end of the project there was a noticeable increase in the time that she spent socialising with her classmates and that she seemed more confident when interacting, even when she was not directly speaking. Overall he was extremely positive about the impact of the project and DG's future potential, and DG herself wrote, 'It made me more confident than I was before. I get more ideas now and oh it was just so cool'.

### JP

At the start of the ten-week project JP was a demanding member of the group. He would regularly misbehave and seemed to enjoy distracting the facilitators and other participants: so much so, that when completing the start of project questionnaire, one young person's answer to the question, 'What did you like least about the session?' was 'I didn't like it when JP messed about because it distracted me and we did not get very much done'. However JP's answers to the same questionnaire included all high scores for confidence, coordination skills, physical fitness and creativity and he stated that he enjoyed the 'dancing' most about the session and when asked what he liked least he stated 'nothing'. This encouraged the Loop facilitators to continue encouraging him to focus and work as part as the team, as they could see he was keen but his energy needed to be channelled.

The facilitators stated 'JP found it difficult to listen to instructions at first and would often do his own activity rather than the one asked of him'. But gradually, through much positive feedback, aerobic exercise and

encouragement to focus, JP began to behave differently. He was gradually given more responsibility to ensure the rhythmical timing of the dance was correct and as a result became more focused and disciplined when dancing. By the time of the performance JP took the project very seriously and showed good patience during the long wait for his groups turn to perform on stage during the rehearsal. For Loop Dance Company JP was a clear example of how the arts, in particular, dance can be used a tool for young people to learn the importance of focus, discipline and teamwork in order to produce high quality results.

## **PC**

PC was a 14 year old boy who at the start of the project seemed quite troubled with issues regarding his sexuality and gender. He was known by staff as being 'bright but difficult' in class, as well as for his attention seeking behaviour. During his group's project, he chose to create a female role, which allowed him to cross-dress. Within this role and the safety of the project, he explored feminised behaviours, enacted female body language, and used vocal and visual communication cues that in a normal day-to-day setting within his peer group would have been impossible. One staff member at the school said to the facilitator that they thought this project was a deeply positive experience for this young person, allowing him a freedom of expression and a safe space for his emotions that had had a 'noticeably calming effect' on his classroom behaviour.

