

theatr ieuenctid canol powys

mpyt

mid powys youth theatre

“...an independent theatre company with a distinct voice, which aims to set the benchmark for excellence in youth and community theatre in remote, rural areas...”

Contents

- 1 Overview
- 2 Of MPYT and mid Powys
- 3 Vision, Mission, Values
- 4 Stakeholders
- 5 Strategic Aims
- 6 Objectives
- 7 Money
- 8 To conclude
- 9 Thank you

Roadmap for Change

This Business Plan outlines the aspirations and practical objectives of Mid Powys Youth Theatre (MPYT) through 2022-2025: seeking to emerge thereafter a more robust, dynamic and flexible organisation; an ambitious force for transformative artistic engagement in the lives of the Young People and communities of this unique, rural landscape.

The ultimate goal is sustainability, but it is during this critical 3-year period that we must establish the momentum and strategic approach to reap the benefits in the long-term.

Since independence (2013) MPYT has punched above its weight with a series of high-impact theatre productions, cross-sector collaborations and vocational training initiatives - testimony to the hard work of a tiny number of volunteers. The reality is one of no core funding or salaried staff and no capacity to deliver the expansive broad-spectrum of work to which MPYT aspires.

How Did We Get Here?

A successful grant application to the Foyle Foundation in 2019 presented the means via a part-time Strategic Development post. We anticipated a two-year process but received funding for one. Then, a few short weeks before commencement of the role, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged. Lockdown offered both crisis and opportunity: some time to step off the hamster-wheel ('delivery-funding-delivery'); to reflect, consult and dream a little. How best to serve our remote, rural context in delivering high-quality participation, training and performance whilst building a model to attract major funders? At time of writing (autumn '21) with the ground beneath us still unsteady, we resolved to use the time to pursue active changes in how the organisation is actively managed by the Board of Trustees and Artistic Director.

Aspirations

MPYT believes in the ability of its engagement to change lives and additionally that there exists in mid Powys, a real need for the work. The loudest and most insistent refrain gleaned through our stakeholder consultation process was clear in asking MPYT to 'make more theatre'. This is significant. But 'More MPYT' should not be confused with more of the same. This Business Plan seeks pro-active change in how the organisation functions, but it is primarily aimed at enabling the engagement model to work more fluently, more insistently and more broadly across both existing and new demographics of our community. Add to this, that within our sprinkling of hard-pressed, local receiving-houses, touring theatre is rarely spotted. 'Satellite Live' is terrific, but expensive and aimed at seasoned theatre-goers (and it's not live). Bluntly put, there is no professional theatre culture in all the vast expanse of mid Powys.

What does this say about the value we place on theatre as an art-form? (That it's not for us?) What does it say to those who enjoy theatre? (Go to the city for a good night out at the theatre?) Moreover, what does it say to those for whom theatre is an alien concept? Well, it says nothing - being voiceless - and the opportunities missed cannot be measured.

In Summary

There will be missteps and mistakes along the way. It is a major challenge. The process will allow experimentation: for pilot work, reflection and re-modelling. MPYT aims to secure an infrastructural core with funded staff posts; to consolidate and strengthen our Creative Tech programme, celebrating success whilst broadening reach; to do likewise with our Young Leaders mentoring, placing faith in Young People and empowering them to act for themselves and their community - making them feel good about themselves and the place they live. This 3-year plan is the start of the journey.

What MPYT offers

Exceptional theatre activity for Young People across a vast and remote, rural catchment: workshops, summer schools and professional masterclasses; research trips, theatre visits and social events; community productions, applied vocational training and mentoring; a learning environment outwith formal education, where participants are encouraged to take risks and learn that it's ok to fail; to ask questions and challenge conventional wisdoms.

What MPYT believes

That participation in high-quality, ensemble theatre offers an immeasurable boost to the personal growth and health & wellbeing of a Young Person. A creative, nurturing environment encouraging Young People to express themselves openly, and setting a high artistic bar, is a powerful, transformational tool with the potential for lasting impact: enhancing communication and thinking skills; developing recognition of individual/social responsibility, and allowing Young People to better explore, question and assimilate their understanding of the world.

Multi-disciplinary

MPYT aspires to be a microcosm of the wider profession, with off-stage disciplines integral to the whole: recognising that Young People need not be on stage to enjoy the benefits. We seek out those who may flourish in other disciplines, offering opportunities wherever they might find the greatest challenge or reward.

Artistic Quality

MPYT is an independent theatre company with a distinct voice, aiming always to create work made by Young People that surprises, challenges and delights: that engages their peers and beyond; that considers themselves and their world; that leaves a lasting impression. MPYT aims to set a benchmark for excellence in youth and community theatre, not only in Powys but nationally and beyond.

Stakeholders' Survey: Response To Primary Questions

Q1: What does MPYT do really well that it just needs to do more of?

Very High-Frequency responses	High-Frequency responses	Other responses (more than once)
Enriching community thro' thought-provoking high-quality theatre: 38% (of responses)	Professional practice in a rural area: 17%	Off-stage opportunities; professional masterclasses; connections with other YP elsewhere; raise local profile with street theatre; readings etc;
Opportunities for YP to explore the world thro' creativity/develop & showcase talents: 31%	Inspiring YP to achieve extraordinary things; unearthing hidden talents: 17%	
Safe social space for like-minded YP from a wide area to meet: 31%	Promotes well-being: 15%	

Q2: What does MPYT not do at all that it really should do?

- More exchange projects / vocational trips: 15% (of responses)
- Build a better local/national/online profile: 15%
- Touring; making theatre in different spaces and places: 13%
- Outreach to broader demographic (ie: the disadvantaged); utilising the potential of MPYT alumni; host classes in other towns OR address travel difficulties; establish own theatre space; establish salaried staff roles(s); more work in schools; digital output/exploration.

Context

At time of writing, we may be emerging, tentatively, from the pandemic, but Covid remains a potent backdrop, serving only to magnify our aspirations, as we anticipate a greater need than ever for Young People to come together (physically - in the same space) and collaborate in artistic response to the complex world they're growing into.

The harsh truth is that should MPYT fail to successfully engage with some key critical questions before 2025 then difficulty will turn to dysfunction.

The list is not exhaustive:

How to build a persuasive, unique spectrum of activity: impactful, proven and irresistible to funders?

How to build a strong public profile, raise awareness, celebrate success?

How to make the case to funders that 'numbers' (participants; project costs; audiences etc) are a qualitatively different concept in a remote, rural context?

How to celebrate professional theatre in an area where there is none?

How to resource professionals in this same context?

How to collaborate without compromising vision?

How to reach the hard-to reach?

How to empower volunteers in a keenly-contested field?

How to build a cohesive, community fundraising model?

How to utilise the vast untapped resource of MPYT alumni in all their guises?

By wrestling with questions such as these through our STRATEGIC AIMS, MPYT can position itself to offer a diverse range of activity: reaching across the yawning divides of class, culture, ability and geography. Core Funding, though it won't solve everything, will make a huge difference and 'making a strong case' is a central pillar of our strategy.

A – Core & Resources

MPYT attracts no core financial support and has no paid staff. To pursue our full ambition will require the establishment of one or more paid roles, offering a unified approach to strategy, management and artistic policy. The Board of Trustees have made the interim decision to allocate a portion of our fiscal reserve to contract the Artistic Director on a part-time basis to 2023. This will be set against a 'hit-list' of strategic objectives in the short-to-medium term. Initially, we will address human resources; business systems; fundraising; website/digital presence; core support;

MPYT 'human' resources can be broadly set into six categories:

1. Young People
2. Trustees
3. Staff
4. Other volunteers
5. Alumni
6. Associate Artists.

A consolidated strategy to make these groups, collectively, the beating heart of MPYT's operations is key. The potential is enormous, but a hand-to-mouth existence for ten years has seen this potential – and attendant goodwill - utilised fitfully. We'll dedicate focus to each in turn within the lifetime of the plan. The last on the list - Associate Artists - will not be resolved in one year or three: the absence of a good reason for mid-career professionals to live and work here is an enormous challenge. (No one said it was going to be easy.)

We have recently implemented a significant expansion of the Board of Trustees, to galvanise and supplement the workload of the existing board, as well as identifying specific strategic objectives for individuals or sub-groups.

The organisation must be able to withstand the departure of key volunteers so that sustainability is built on roles rather than individuals. A clear set of business frameworks will cover each aspect of the organisation's activity (Project Management; Impact & Evaluation; Publicity & Marketing etc;) in addition to existing Policies & Procedures.

A more defined and dynamic approach to community fundraising is sorely-needed: again this will be time-tabled and clearly structured to work in concert with a new website; social media strategy and donations programme.

B – Theatre & Production

MPYT is a producing theatre company - it's what we do and why we're here: to offer Young People a sense of the power in creative, collective, ensemble; to commission local artists and mentor young professionals; to entertain, challenge and delight local audiences.

But without skilled professionals – or the funds to commission them – MPYT ceases to make sense. We'll conduct a wide-ranging, sustained call-out for associate professionals and establish connections with professional companies and community arts organisations to establish a database of associate artists. We will establish a pathway from the urban centres of population into our area for visiting professionals and companies to deliver work and train our Young People.

We will establish a ring-fenced Theatre Production Fund into which all community fundraising will feed: augmented by bespoke project applications. MPYTers will understand the cost of production and be active in production fundraising.

We will make the argument that such activity – where no sector exists – doesn't only come at a premium, but is essential to the cultural life-blood of a community. Though project funding will remain a challenge, MPYT is uniquely placed in marrying remote, rural location with aspirations to industry-standards of excellence.

Success will be a 3-year spectrum of production activity: different theatre models; new – and varied – audiences; live and accessible theatre in all manner of places and spaces; intergenerational work and companies of young adults; a moving roster of theatre training courses; aimed at different age groups; we will deliver pilot projects aimed at Young People with additional learning needs; Young Adults in their twenties; and hard-to-reach Primary kids respectively.

If Theatre & Production flies the MPYT flag, then it will speak of excellence and originality. We'll work with local, national & international artists to make thrilling theatre in new ways, for new audiences, with new participants, in new places.

The flag will fly high and be visible.

C – Outreach & Community

The testimony of MPYT participants and friends, past and present, bears witness to the extraordinary force for well-being, positivity, learning and social cohesion that can accrue from engagement. So why don't more young people get involved?

Barriers exist in cultural perceptions; economic circumstance; transport & access; profile/awareness and more. Identifying strategies to break through is a primary target for the next three years. One of the fiercest challenges is the sheer size – and population sparsity - of our catchment.

Profile is important here, as is partnership. MPYT, too-little known in strands of our communities, needs a strong digital reach. A clear profile will demonstrate that anyone who wants to take part in MPYT activity can do so, irrespective of cost, geographical access or ability. It is not enough to say we are 'open'. We have to let people know we want them.

We will explore, over the next three years, and in collaboration:

- a collaboration with primary schools working through the medium of drama for children struggling to assimilate into school life
- a pilot theatre project aimed at Young Adults with ALNs.
- an intergenerational theatre collaboration
- a community-grown theatre project in a local housing estate
- a pilot theatre group aimed at Young Adults aged 20-30.

Outreach, it should be said, may take different forms:

tech training or other specialist discipline (playwriting, puppetry, graphic art);

it may target audiences, artists or cross-sector partnerships as

readily as it does participants;

it can (and will) include a critical consideration of transport and/or access issues relating to MPYT activity.

The possibilities are endless, limited by resources rather than imagination.

D – Training & Mentoring

Recent long-term initiatives such as our '*GetOffTheStage*' and 'Young Leaders' programmes have amply demonstrated the demand for, and tangible impact of, placing Young People in positions of responsibility (artistic, technical or management) then allowing them to flourish and grow under dedicated mentoring. As with other areas of the Development Plan, a more formalised approach will allow these areas of engagement to reach more widely and deeply into the community.

We will design and implement a comprehensive approach to leadership and training opportunities for older members of the MPYT group: proactive involvement in the artistic, logistical and financial planning of the MPYT year. Agency is key: seeking to put their voice and ideas at the heart of how we approach community engagement; fundraising; digital profile; and documenting the organisation's activity. With rights come responsibilities and Safeguarding will be a necessary element of this framework. A particular focus, where applicable, will be given to Young Adults not leaving the area to study in academia.

We will begin a new roll-out of our '*GetOffTheStage*' strategy - applied mentoring for young creative techs: stage managers; designers; sound/lighting designers etc. Pre-pandemic the critical skills shortage in the UK creative tech sector was estimated at 10,000 jobs over five years. We believe there is a pressing case for advocacy of the vocational possibilities within creative tech (stage; tv; film; digital) creating awareness, improving access and supporting Young People's aspirations.

We will also begin talking to cross-sector organisations and potential partners on how we might think to extend our Tech Training across a wider demographic and to hard-to-reach groups. This is a much-cherished, long-term aspiration, and we'll keep it simmering for now. Training and Mentoring is a critical (applied) extension of theatre production. The more solid and sustainable we make our primary activity, the more scope we create for offering ambitious targets in training and mentoring.

OUTLINE

From April '22 each MPYT year-plan will contain a set of agreed objectives falling within our strategic aims. It's a fancy 'to-do' list: and we intend that the very act of devising and implementing strategic objectives will itself foster a proactive business dynamic.

How Does This Objective Help Us?

Each objective must clearly enhance at least one of the following criteria:

Reach	participants; audience; volunteers; artists; alumni; partners
Capacity	ability to provide & sustain activity; to broaden and deepen the same
Finance	exactly what it says on the tin; either core or designated funds
Profile	celebrating the MPYT 'name'; marketing; publicity; recognition

They are of course interdependent: with the capacity to offer more activity we can extend reach; an extended reach may help to raise profile; an enhanced profile might help to attract finance; finance will support or develop capacity; collectively allowing MPYT to reach more broadly and deeply into our community on a sustainable model.

Smart' Test Moreover, each Strategic Objective should pass the SMART test:

Specific	what is it exactly?
Measurable	how will we know when it's done?
Agreed	is there consensus on its inclusion within the Business Plan?
Realistic	it sounds great, but can we do this?
Time bound	when will it be completed by?

Pre-Launch Objectives **Prior to the launch of the Business Development Plan (Apr '22) the Board has agreed, and begun to implement, the following objectives**

- Expansion and re-orientation of MPYT Board of Trustees
- Major review, and implementation, of MPYT Safeguarding Policy (& other procedures)
- Drawing up of social, fundraising & activity calendar
- Funding application to support '50p Drama Club'
- Funding application to support 'GetOffTheStage' tech provision in autumn '22 project
- Writing and implementation of MPYT 'Project Plan' template

Objectives Year 1

Within the coming financial year, we will devise, agree and implement the following strategic objectives.

- Design, Build and Launch MPYT Website in tandem with...
- ... devise and implement donations programme -'How To Give MPYT Money?'
- ... devise social media strategy
- Pilot '50p Drama Club' in collaboration with local primary schools
- Devise and Implement 'Young Leaders' Strategy
- Major Community Project Application (ACW/similar)

We aim for the preceding list to be fully implemented by the end of '22 or early '23. Our attention would then turn to 'reserve' objectives otherwise set for '23-'24.

- 'Spring Clean' – community-facing week of performance; training; outreach; fundraising; networking & advocacy;
- Artists Call-out – establish a roster of freelance associate professionals -
- Play Readings – pilot professional play readings in community venues
- Devise and Implement Impact & Evaluation Strategy
- Preliminary Work – Part-Time Core Post application

It's crucial to say that all strategic objectives will be under constant scrutiny and subject to review. The 'hit-list' as we go forward will evolve; we'll adapt not only to successes, but to unforeseen challenges and new opportunities.

MPYT has worked hard for many years to maintain a strong financial reserve of (12-18 months): the logic being that, should the organisation face closure then the process might be managed gradually, allowing for a suitable programme of activity. However we understand that such provision is discouraged and most funders consider any reserve greater than one year to be excessive - and sufficient reason for rejecting an application. This heightens the imperative to secure multi-year core funding and the Board of Trustees have decided to engage the Artistic Director on part-time basis for this financial year.

We have in March been successful with an application to the Ashley Family Foundation for £10,000 to support applied training in creative tech. This will contribute, in part, towards a production in autumn 2022. We have, at the same time, been unsuccessful in an application to support our Junior Theatre Training pilot: a strategically vital strand. We will pursue other options, but these two parcels of news illuminate the parlous nature of long-term planning.

Accordingly, we anticipate the current bank reserve of around £35,000 (including 'restricted' funds) will reduce to £15,000 by year end (April '23), making no assumption for additional income. It's said that any business plan must by design, assume a 'knowable future'. Clearly for any small charity like MPYT, no such knowledge can exist. We 'know' that, financially, the next three years will be rocky. Maybe it always will?

Where we can be clear - where we can be certain: is in adopting a proactive, professional approach to community fundraising and donations strategies; in the organisation and deployment of invaluable volunteer resources; and in our determination to model a range of activity that will prove irresistible to long-term funding.

WHY?

Over the life of this development plan (2022-'25) MPYT will take clear, deliberate and substantial steps towards establishing a sustainable, multi-disciplinary and broad-spectrum, community theatre model that celebrates contemporary professional practice:

- **to offer the Young People of our vast, remote & sparsely populated catchment, the vital, life-changing potential of high-quality, ensemble, theatre engagement;**
- **to offer some resistance to remote, rural isolation and the scourge of poor mental health among Young People;**
- **to forge pathways into a boom industry for rural Young People;**
- **to offer community audiences of mid Powys a collective artistic endeavour to relish and celebrate;**
- **to offer professional artists an opportunity to work locally, at a proper remuneration, without compromising artistic quality;**
- **to offer local community groups, businesses and cross-sector partners the opportunity to explore theatre as a medium for their own mission;**
- **to act as advocate for the medium of theatre in mid Powys.**

THE ORDER OF THINGS

Our strategic aims are set in their specific order to feed, chronologically, into one other, and it all begins with Core and Resources. Without building a strong, sustainable – and identifiable - core, there can be no programme of theatre activity; without theatre there is no outreach; no training or mentoring.

Let's begin at the beginning.

9 Thank you

MPYT Board of Trustees

Sue Early, Eleanor Baird,
Hannah Harrop, Louise Williams,
Molly-Ellen Bier, Liam Cole & Megan Dauksta

Treasurer: Mary Bunny

MPYT friends & supporters, associate artists, alumni
and all who contributed thoughts and feedback to the consultation process.

Funders:

Foyle Foundation

Community Foundation in Wales

Ashley Family Foundation

Powys County Council

The Margaret Davies Charity

Our Arts Angel



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
IN WALES
SEFYDLIAD CYMUNEDOL
YNG NGHYMRU



FOYLE FOUNDATION