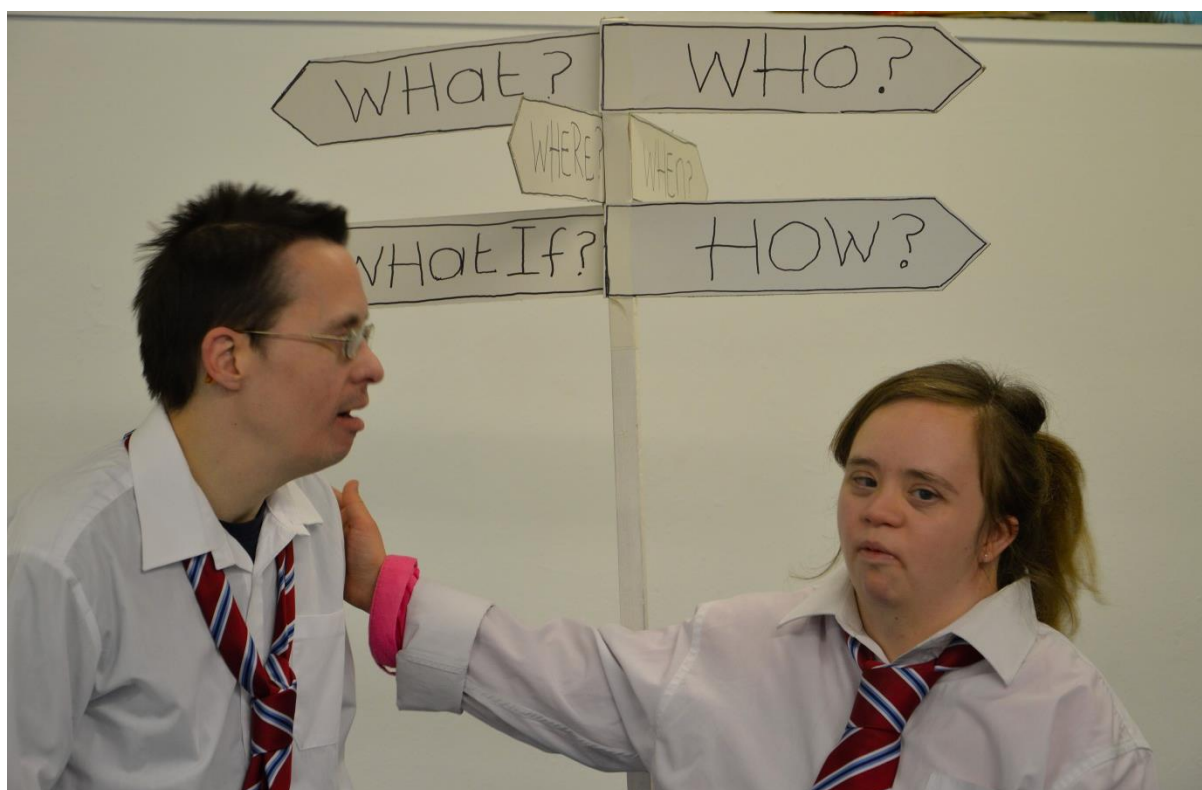


'Staging Transitions' 2014

A research-informed inclusive theatre project for and with young people with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities.

Report by Annie Smol and Dr. Maria Vaccarella.



KING'S
College
LONDON

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Staging Transitions – The research project

Face Front Inclusive Theatre (Cultural Lead: Annie Smol) and Academic Lead Dr. Maria Vaccarella were brought together through the Cultural Institute at King's College London to collaborate on a research project for their Innovation Programme. The objectives agreed were to:

- test the effectiveness of inclusion practices throughout the stages of an academic informed cultural project aimed at young people with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD).
- respond to a timely concern in education and adult services, namely transition planning and implementation.
- include young LDD people and their parents/carers throughout the project.

We have been looking at the following questions:

- What are the challenges faced by young people with learning difficulties and disabilities when they leave school?
- What are the hopes and fears associated with their transition into adulthood?
- Can inclusive theatre help them make sense of this crucial phase of their lives?

Building upon previous research on the use of theatre to improve democratic participation of LDD people in society, we have begun to devise a new multi-accessible play, based on both academic literature and interviews with parents, guardians, carers, teachers, and young LDD people themselves about their hopes and fears or experiences of transition into the adult world. This action research opportunity has created a non-conventional, innovative platform to test current strategies for transition implementation, which we hope will feed into policy making. We also wish that this project will foster an innovative, inclusive form of collaboration between research at King's and the community, which will benefit both partners and further advance the development of applied medical humanities.

This project touches upon a number of research areas conducted at King's and has great potential for ground-breaking interdisciplinary work. Disciplinary areas involved are: applied theatre and performance studies, critical disability studies, education, and medical humanities. Face Front has provided King's Academic Lead with a high quality action research opportunity: the experience of multi-accessible theatre and established partnerships with special schools has facilitated the encounter and collaboration between academics and young LDD people, their parents, teachers and other professionals who work for and with them. Following this report we would hope that through Face Front's intervention, academics will learn how to better focus

their theories and methodologies, so that they suit participants with a view of possibly contributing to policy making in the long term. At the same time, the Academic Lead has provided Face Front with up-to-date results of the theoretical debates on concepts (e.g. accessibility, empowerment and agency) that inform Face Front's practice: this dialogic exchange between academic and grass-roots needs will assist Face Front in their process of evaluation, improvement and future planning.

Inclusion

For the purposes of this report, we subscribe to Miller and Katz's (2002) definition of inclusion as 'a sense of belonging: feeling respected, valued for who you are; feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others so that you can do your best.' For this project, the focus is on the inclusion of LDD people as artists, contributors to the content of the theatre, audience and participants in the theatre.

Inclusion in theatre aesthetics is linked to the access to communication. Face Front's multi-layered approach stimulates our audiences on different sensory levels through interweaving the visual (physical theatre, movement, film) and the aural (song, sound-scaping, poetry and music), using sign language and audio description as an integral part of the performance. Our style gives audience members different routes of access to the performance, whilst enabling everyone to have a theatrical experience of quality.

Impact of theatre on the transition experience of young disabled people and their families

By impact, we mean making a lasting, positive difference to a socially marginalised group going through a significant change in their life. The beneficial effect of our project will be on young LDD people themselves, their parents, transition professionals and policy. In the short term, this has been evidenced through verbal feed-back and questionnaires from the above groups. In the longer term, Face Front would like to be able to do a national tour of the theatre production, along with training for transition professionals and parents and collect both qualitative and quantitative data over a period of 1 – 3 years.

Works Cited

Miller, Frederick A. and Katz, Judith H. 2002. *The Inclusion Breakthrough: Unleashing the Real Power of Diversity*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers

Background

Face Front Inclusive Theatre was set up by both disabled and non-disabled artists to create genuine opportunities for disabled people to be included in the arts, to work in an inclusive way, making exciting, challenging and above all accessible art for all audiences. Face Front has been creating high quality multi-accessible theatre for over fourteen years with disabled and non-disabled arts practitioners.

The uniqueness of Face Front is that our company includes people with physical, sensory and learning impairments, and those with invisible disabilities, including mental health issues, as well as non-disabled people of different ages and ethnic backgrounds. At the core of all our work is our belief that 'it's about belonging'. We believe that our multi-accessible style of performance is a distinct and exciting theatrical form in its own right, appealing to a wide range of both established and new audiences. Our vision is to use the arts to pioneer a more inclusive world.

'We are very happy to support the development of this important work which will have a significant impact on the map of inclusive work in London.' **Neil Rousell, Director, Leisure & Culture Department**

'I have always found the organisation to produce work of quality and have been particularly impressed by the way they develop disabled artists and make their work accessible to disabled audiences.' **London Councils**

Face Front works with artists and managers who are traditionally excluded from the arts. Our approach is flexible, supporting artists' access needs and those who have not had the opportunity to train in the arts. By nurturing our artists while challenging them to take risks, we aim to help them reach their potential and achieve excellence.

At the heart of our educational work is the desire to break down barriers and prejudices, to improve emotional well-being and highlight the challenges of socially excluded people to service providers and policy makers.

Face Front's training for artists and education, health and social care professionals focus' on inclusion and diversity from a practical and theoretical point of view. Our soft skills training for disabled adults and young people raises confidence and self-esteem, motivation and organisation skills, targeting people who have become excluded from society.

The need for the project

Face Front has been working inclusively for over fourteen years and over that time it has been clear that, like the arts council states from the 'Taking part' survey (2010-2013), disabled people have significantly lower rates of arts attendance and participation than non-disabled people. Barriers experienced include: negative attitudes and prejudice, and assumptions about what they can and can't do. This leads to fewer opportunities for disabled people to become arts professionals and therefore role models, and fewer chances for disabled people to experience the arts as audience or participants.

There are over 1 million disabled people and 1 million deaf and hard of hearing people within Greater London. Less than 2% of employees in the arts are deaf and/or disabled people and with over 10% of the entire population of London being deaf or disabled. There are about 157,932 people with learning disabilities in the UK (Public Health England).

The Mayor's Cultural Strategy April 2004 stated that:

Disabled people had the lowest participation in regional leisure activities and only half of Disabled Londoners surveyed attended a leisure activity once a month.

Disabled people are much less likely to attend cultural events. In the draft Culture Strategy consultation only 50% went to at least one event a month compared with 74% of the total. This is a significant number of people who are effectively barred from many cultural activities.

Jo Verrent, the senior producer of `unlimited_points` out that in 2014, a survey by Scope found that two-thirds of the British public feel uncomfortable talking to disabled people, while more than a third think of disabled people as not as productive as everyone else. It also found that 4 in 10 disabled people have been denied a job because of an employer's attitude to disability, and showed extensive evidence of widespread discrimination and hate crime against disabled people. This is after 2012 and the improvements in public perception following the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

These London and national statistics confirm the lack of access to the arts for disabled people and confirm the personal experiences gathered from the many disabled people that Face Front have worked with both as artists, audience and participants and from the research gathered from outreach work, focus groups and questionnaires with disabled people in North and East London.

Over the last eight years, Face Front has been doing extensive drama work around the issues facing young learning disabled people in transition from school to adult

life. We have been commissioned to work at special schools and at 'transition clubs' to create plays with LDD young people that they have then performed at large 'transition events' and at training sessions for transition professionals and parent/carers. In summer 2014, we interviewed over 50 parents/carers and young people and found that there is much confusion and anxiety around this time, with many of them feeling lost, and having fewer opportunities than their non-disabled peers. Many young people and parents/carers felt that they were not being listened to and felt the support received throughout school is lost once they leave: they felt abandoned.

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>

<http://static.london.gov.uk/mayor/strategies/culture/>

"@guardian: Disability and the arts: the best of times, the worst of times
<http://trib.al/28SDyru>

Research background

At the beginning of our project, Dr Vaccarella conducted a literature review to capture the state of research on the two main topics that underpin “Staging Transitions”, i.e. creative drama intervention for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities, and their transition into adulthood. At general level, a first remark must be made with regards to the significant amount of scholarly and policy literature on transition of young people with learning difficulties and disabilities into adulthood, which contrasts with the modest quantity of research on creative drama intervention. Rather than duplicating research conclusions already drawn by more competent bodies, the following summary is structured as a survey with a specific (albeit under-researched) focus that can benefit from previous work in cognate research areas. Attached is a list of helpful resources that will provide more detailed information on specific aspects (e.g. transition policy, etc.).

Transition into adulthood of young people with learning difficulties and disabilities features highly on the political agenda in the UK. A key document is the White Paper *Valuing People* (2001), which explicitly framed transition as a Government Objective:

As young people with learning disabilities move into adulthood, to ensure continuity of care and support for the young person and their family; and to provide equality of opportunity in order to enable as many disabled young people as possible to participate in education, training or employment. (41)

In order to tackle the difficulties and lack of coordination around transition, the White Paper highlighted the role of the Connexion Service (which is, in actual fact, open to all teenagers, regardless of their health status) for advice, guidance and support within the overarching framework of “person-centred planning.” This is reinforced in *Valuing People Now* (2009), a three-year cross government strategy for learning disabilities in England. It is worth highlighting here that “person-centred planning” has emerged as the key approach to transition: what is unfortunately clear from a number of best practice guidelines (to name only one, *Pathways 2 to Getting a Life: Transition Planning for Full Lives*, 2011) and scholarly articles is that, despite tactical agreement, policy initiatives do not always smoothly translate into effective implementation at local level.

From a more theoretical point of view, a still valuable introduction to the topic of transition into adulthood for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities is Townsley’s 2004 background report for the project “The Road Ahead,” which covers scholarly and policy literature on the subject from 1990 and 2003. It is organized around six main areas:

1. What is transition to adulthood?
2. Changes at transition
3. Choices at transition
4. What to expect from services at transition
5. Transition and the family
6. Feelings and emotions at transition

The report is also particularly helpful for our purposes thanks to its specific take on the information needs of transitioning young people with learning difficulties, which are clearly listed at the end of each section. For example, this is the list that concludes (and somehow operationalizes) the first chapter on the definition of transition:

Key areas of information need for young people with learning difficulties and their families:

- What does the transition to adulthood mean to young people with learning difficulties? What does it mean for their families?
- What sorts of life changes might young people with learning difficulties and families expect at transition? Over what period of time?
- What do young people and families think makes for a 'successful' transition?
- The importance of recognising that transition is a process, not a series of discrete events. And that transition to adulthood may be achieved in many different ways and time-frames. Transition to adulthood for people with learning difficulties may take significantly longer than for other young people and indeed 'markers' of adult status may continue to be achieved throughout life, not just between the ages of 14-25.
- There will be different issues to consider for young men, young women, young people from Black and minority ethnic groups, young people with high individual support needs, and young people living away from home. Transition to adulthood means different things to different people. (7-8)

In view of the scope of our project, it is also worth mentioning here a number of studies (Heslop et al 2002; Carnaby et al. 2003; Beresford 2004; Tarleton and Ward 2005; Heslop and Abbott 2007, 2009), most of which published after Townsley's report, that identify, among others, two areas for improvement in transition planning, namely:

- involvement of young people with learning disabilities
- accessible, personalised information

These look like areas that can be easily addressed by means of creative drama intervention.

It is significant that all these different calls for better, tailored information do not specify any effective provision modality, or the role that the arts in general could play to facilitate this process. For example, *Pathways to Getting a Life: Transition Planning for Full Lives* relies heavily on graphic summaries, but does not elaborate

on the rationale behind this choice. At the same time, this document could inadvertently provide a much-needed bridge between the two main topics in the background of our project, when it states that:

Transition should be a time of creativity with great choices around where people live, how they spend their time in education, employment and community and their goals for adult life. (p. 9)

This emphasis on the creative aspect of transition demands more thorough investigations on the contribution that the creative arts can offer in this context.

A clarification is necessary here: in line with our project, creative drama intervention in this literature review is understood according to Davis and Behm's 1987 definition:

an improvisational, non-exhibitional, process-centered form of drama in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact, and reflect upon human experience (262).

Though certainly meant to improve the wellbeing of participants, creative drama intervention is not a form of art therapy (e.g. aimed at developing language skills): it is rather a form of reflective practice and an opportunity for action research.

The two modalities of intervention are in fact not easily discernible. For example, Jindal-Snape and Vettraino's 2007 exhaustive review of research on the use of drama techniques to enhance social-emotional development of people with special needs contains useful suggestions for facilitators in both fields. They conclude there is some evidence of the profitable role of drama in the social-emotional development of young people with special needs, while calling for more evidence (especially, from the schoolchildren's point of view) and collaboration among researchers in the area.

Before surveying a few interesting examples from the research literature, it is worth recalling here that in England alone, there are different theatre companies that have been working with people with learning difficulties and disabilities for decades (e.g. The Lawnmowers, Graeae, Mind the Gap). Based on their experience in the field, The Graeae Theatre Company have also published guidelines (available for download from their website) on inclusive theatre practice, or what they call 'aesthetics of access.'

A strong motivation at the core of these creative drama interventions at community level is peer education, as described for example by Price and Barron 1999 with regards to a project of the Lawnmowers Theatre Group. It revolved around the concept of entertainment by and for people with learning disabilities, within the general framework of personal skills development and social inclusion. A similar, performance-driven project (Stage Life) is described in Stickley et al. 2012: thanks to rigorous qualitative data collection, they could also measure the positive outcome of their project. At the end of the study, the young people with learning disabilities

involved reported higher levels of self-confidence, enjoyment and social inclusion. The authors also reflected on the challenges of channelling non-conventional creativity towards a standard performance and concluded:

For the Stage Life, the principle of direct and meaningful participation involves balancing participants' freedom to take their ideas wherever, whilst also putting in place some form of supportive control in order that the activity is seen as positive in terms of esteem-raising and a positive public success. (256)

In the more specific case of secondary school students with learning disabilities transitioning into adulthood, Schnapp and Olsen 2003 report on their own experience with a US transition programme, Project Access, which relies on drama techniques to teach self-advocacy. They review a variety of useful drama exercises (e.g. "Punch, Blast, Kick," "Changeable Object," "Mirror Exercise," "Blind Walk," "Funny Face," "Puppeteers"), but they clarify that:

when using drama to teach communication and self advocacy, developing acting talent is less important than enhancing students' abilities in oral expression. (213)

For our work, Fitzgerald 2007 is by far the most illuminating example of how to use drama techniques as a means to engage young people with learning disabilities in research on their own needs. Her article contains a helpful review of previous work on peripheral aspects (i.e. young people with learning disabilities as reliable sources of research data, or drama as both a data gathering and a data presenting modality), which help frame the context of their drama pilot project on physical education and free-time activities. Fitzgerald also includes a discussion of difficulties encountered during the process (i.e. transcription accuracy and facilitators/researcher divergence): she briefly mentions the issue of the inclusiveness of the drama pilot, but unfortunately does not provide any insight. Further evidence, though only tangentially relevant to our project, comes from studies of drama techniques used with children with autism (Peter 2003; Trowsdale and Hayhow 2013).

Finally, it is worth mentioning Kempe's "Lauren project," which used drama techniques to co-created the biography of a fictional classmate together with a young people with learning disabilities: they finally gave life to Lauren by acting "to her" in the production of a video. Though Kempe does not mention transition at all, the idea of using this fictional character so that young people with learning disabilities could explore their own hopes and fears regarding their future is very much in line with our project. They created a form of inclusive theatre by means of drama exercises, narrative-based drama and collaborative script writing (Kempe 2012).

In conclusion, it is clear that the two research areas under scrutiny have rarely come into contact. Despite scarce evidence on the specific topic of transition planning, literature encourages the use of creative drama intervention to help young people with learning difficulties and disabilities fulfil their potential. There is a need for more

projects, such as ours, that might add to the existing literature on transition by using creative drama intervention as a form of participatory research technique for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities, within the framework of person-centred transition planning.

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Trowsdale, J. and Hayhow, R. (2013) "Can Mimetics, a Theatre-based Practice, Open Possibilities for Young People with Learning Disabilities? A Capability Approach." *British Journal of Special Education*, 40: 72-79.

Websites of theatre companies working with people with learning difficulties and disabilities

<http://www.thelawnmowers.co.uk/company/index.php>

<http://www.graeae.org/> (contains guidelines on inclusive theatre)

<http://www.mind-the-gap.org.uk>

'Staging Transitions' - Description

The creative part of 'Staging Transition' consisted of:

- planning the project
- conducting drama workshops and interviews to research the material.
- research and devising the theatre with a team of disabled and non-disabled artists
- rehearsing the theatre
- presenting the 'work in progress' and collecting feed-back.
- evaluating the project
- planning for the development of the project.

In May 2014: Julie McNamara, (the project's writer), Annie Smol (director and Cultural Lead for the project) and Peter Faventi (performer and co-writer) prepared and ran a series of drama workshops and interviews with a total of 46 young LDD people, 8 parent/carers and 5 school staff at the following venues: Stars Day services (aged 18 – 25), Oaktree School (aged 14 – 19), Riverside School (aged 14 – 16), and Barnet and Southgate FE college (aged 18 – 25). We also interviewed 4 LDD adults, who had completed their transition journey and could reflect upon it.

The aims of the visits were:

- to find out the hopes and concerns (around the topic of transition) of young LDD people from 14 – 25 years, the professionals who work with them and their parents/carers.
- to find out the current cultural terms of reference for our 'audience' in terms of leisure, music, education, language.
- to 'try out' different drama methods and ways of communicating – to explore their accessibility.

Alongside this, we held meetings with transition organisations, who are experts in the field, including 'Preparing for Adulthood' from the National Development Team for Inclusion, the Council of Disabled Children and their Transition Information Network, the Social Care Institute for Excellence and the Lead from the London Transition Forum. We also researched a variety of written and online materials around transition options and the transition journey.

In June 2014: Smol, McNamara and Faventi met with the creative team including LDD actors, Ellen Goodey (actor and co-director) and Barry Churchill with mentor Darren Carr, 2 LDD dancer/choreographers from 'Blink', Francis Majekodunmi and Delson Weekes with their mentor Katherine Gill, an LDD musician composer from 'Heart n Soul', Aldean Blair and his artistic mentor Ned Smith, and an LDD

visual artist from 'Action Space', Declan Leslie with his mentor Shelly Davies. The aims for the 'devising sessions' were to:

- develop a collaborative, accessible way of working to ensure that all artists could be fully included.
- to facilitate leadership opportunities ensuring that the artists with LDD were at the centre of the artistic decision making and leading work from their area of experience.
- to develop the ideas of the LDD artists and share their own experiences of transition.

June was an experimental period, trying out ideas in music, dance, drama, set design, as well as sharing stories. These ideas were then pulled together for 'work in progress' presentations for the organisations that had helped with the research in May. The audience comprised of young LDD people, parents/guardians, transition professionals from health, housing and social services and the school staff.

The aims of the 'work in progress' presentations were:

- to find out if the presentation engages its target audience.
- to hear the views and opinions of the young people and parent/carers, so that our new play is relevant and truthful in its content.
- to see if the play's style is accessible to young LDD people .

After each 'sharing' we then had focus groups with all the young people, plus parents, transition professionals, and (where possible) school staff to evaluate our aims and collect their ideas to develop the play.

The Academic Lead gave feedback at one of the rehearsal sessions and one sharing.

In July – Sept 2014: we evaluated the process with all the artists and their mentors.

In November 2014: we presented the work in progress to an audience of LDD young people, plus academics, arts funders and practitioners, and transition organisations/leads at King's College London.



Beyond November 2014: We hope to gain further funding in order to have another period of research and development to turn the ideas into a full play, and then tour to schools, colleges and day services nationally.

Analysis of the research with schools

As part of our research project, we needed to involve disabled young people and their guardians throughout the project, so we started by consulting with them in schools, at day services and at college. The main aims of the research workshops were:

- to find out what are the options of transition as perceived by young people in school.
- what are their hopes and fears for transition regarding:
 - relationships with friends, boy/girlfriends, parents
 - work, education, volunteering, other?
 - housing/Independent living

In terms of making realistic characters for our play and achieve understanding as much as possible from the young people's perspective, we also wanted to find out whether they identified themselves as 'disabled', particularly those that have always attended special education, and which music, films, leisure activities they like. We also wanted to find out from them what makes theatre accessible. We needed to develop research methods that would be enjoyable and help to build trust between researchers and young people. We first engaged the young people in a variety of drama games and exercises that included the questions we wanted to ask: e.g. miming favourite activities, creating photo images with their bodies, or short scenes on what they could do, when they leave school, and show images of their emotions about the different elements of change.

In practise, the research team and young people had some very enjoyable sessions and we learnt a lot of general and background information about the way the young people were feeling about transition and their different levels of understanding about their future options, how much control they had, or they felt they had over their future.

There was a huge difference between the young people with mild learning difficulties to those with more moderate or severe, but across the board about 90% of the young people were not aware that they had had a 'transition' meeting and approximately 65% were not aware that they could make their own decisions.

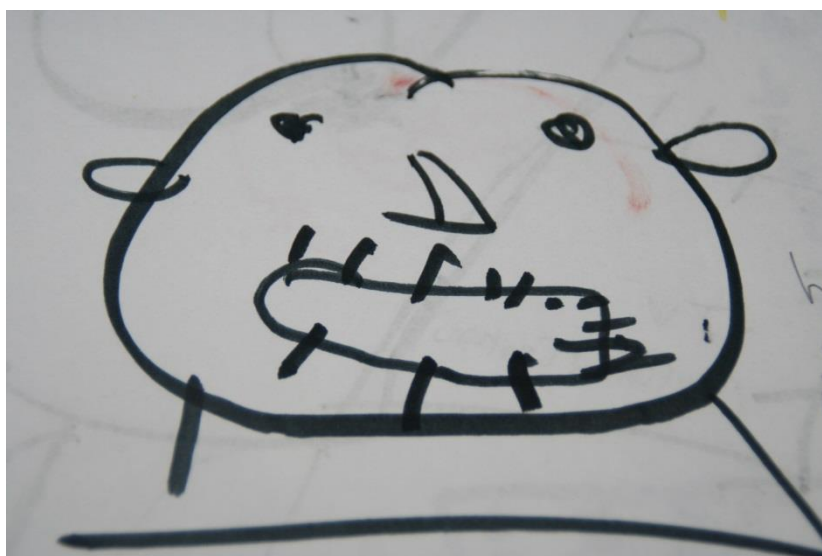
Once we had gained their trust, we then came back and interviewed the young people, as well as speaking to teachers and family members. This research was much more personal in nature, so ethically, we needed to make sure that all the participants understood that we wanted to use their stories, but that all information

would stay anonymous and that the views and experiences they shared would possibly be combined with others stories, to make a set of characters. When bringing the stories into the rehearsal room, no names or identifying information was used. We also explained to the young people that if they said anything of concern to us, we would need to let an adult that can help them know. All the contributors were very keen to share with us and chose to be interviewed.

We used the following questions as a starting point:

- 1) What do you like about school?
- 2) What don't you like?
- 3) What are you doing next, when you leave school?
- 4) Who has helped you to decide what you want to do?
- 5) How will you get to where you are going? (transport)
- 6) Where do you want to live? Who do you want to live with?
- 7) What do you want to do during the day? What in your leisure time?
- 8) Will anyone help you to do what you want to do?
- 9) What is important for you to do?

These questions would be adapted depending on the different ways the young people communicated and they would be illustrated with drawings or photos: some would draw their answers; some would act them out; others were happy to talk. It was interesting to see the different styles of questioning and particularly the way Peter Faventi, our LDD researcher, who would ask what sometimes appeared to be 'random' questions, but that did link in with the subject matter in a non-linear way. For example asking 'What is your shoe size?' Which then helped us to explore whether they know their own shoe size or is this something a carer knows? Do they buy or have an input in choosing their own shoes? Who pays for their shoes at present and who in the future? Can they and do they want to go to the shops independently?



Above: Drawing in response to the question "How do you feel about moving on?" by a young person with severe learning disabilities.

We were also able to interview some parents/carers and family members. There was a notable difference between some of the young people and the family members. Some of the young people found the whole concept of transition very difficult to comprehend, especially those who had always been at the same school, they had no experience of anything else, so some thought everything would be fine and that the adults around them would sort it all out. Some were worried about leaving friends and school staff, some were excited about what would be happening next, with a few worried about leaving the safety of what they know.

'I just want to know if I can go on a bus? Where do I go on the bus? I want to but my Mum wouldn't trust me to go on the bus on my own but I really want to. I might get in trouble if the bus driver was cross with me and he might say where's your Mum? But I do want to go on my own.' (LDD participant, **17 years old**)

This was especially true of the young people on the autistic spectrum, who found the whole prospect of change very frightening. The most extreme case was reported by a parent who said:

'My boy was suicidal. He was worried the whole time running up to leaving school. He says to me one day: 'What will happen if I just walk in front of that bus?' I realized then how serious he was.'

The relatives were generally far more distressed about the whole process than the young people. Two parents were in tears almost from the start of their interviews, others said how very difficult and frightening they were finding the whole process:

'I was terrified when it came to the time he had to leave school, cos school was like a family, a support network for me.'

All agreed that adult services provided far less support and that the whole process of personal budgets was confusing. They were worried their child would have far less support than at school:

'You have to fight for everything. I pity those that don't know the system, honest to God I do.'

Some parents were worried about bullying at mainstream colleges:

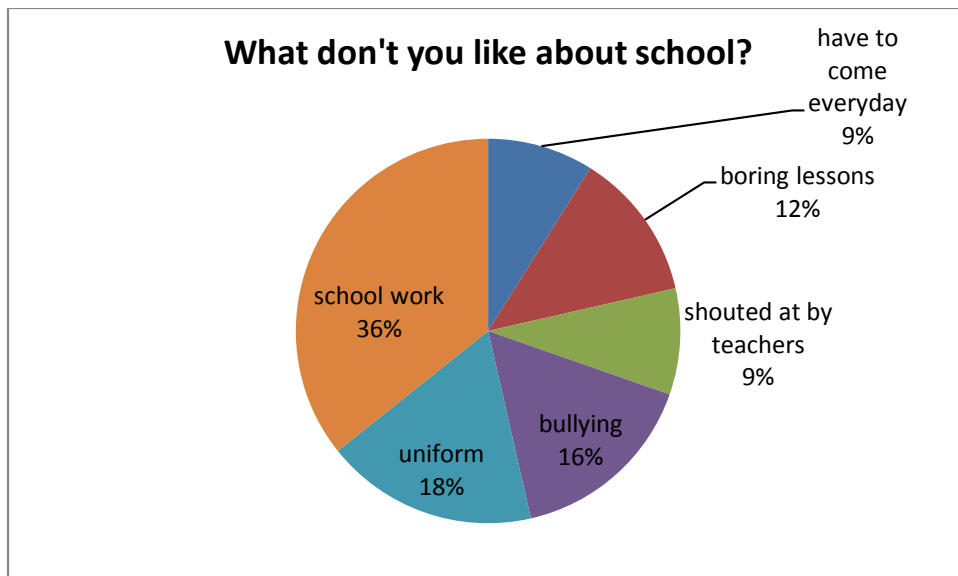
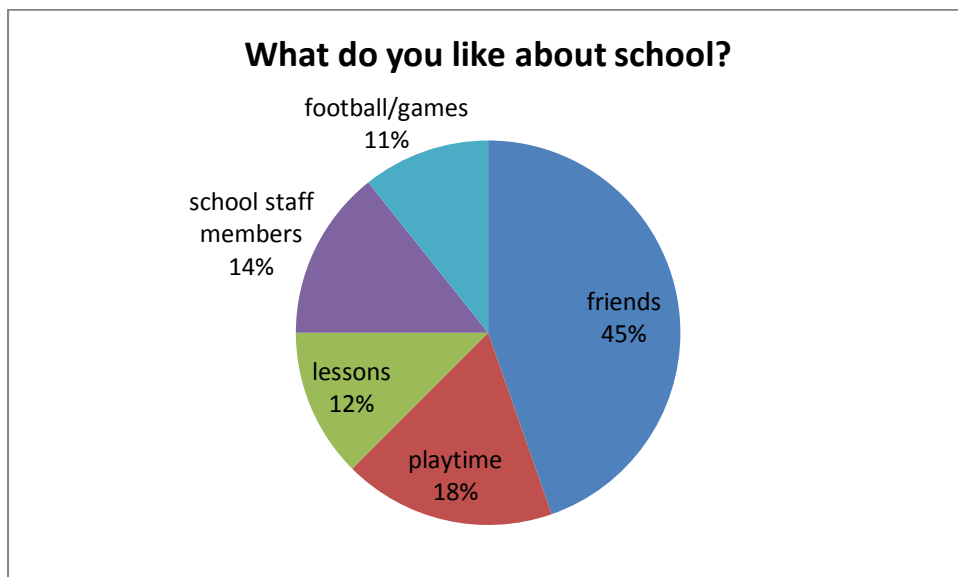
'She would have been a little sheep lost at college – She needs someone to be with her all the time.'

And another parent added:

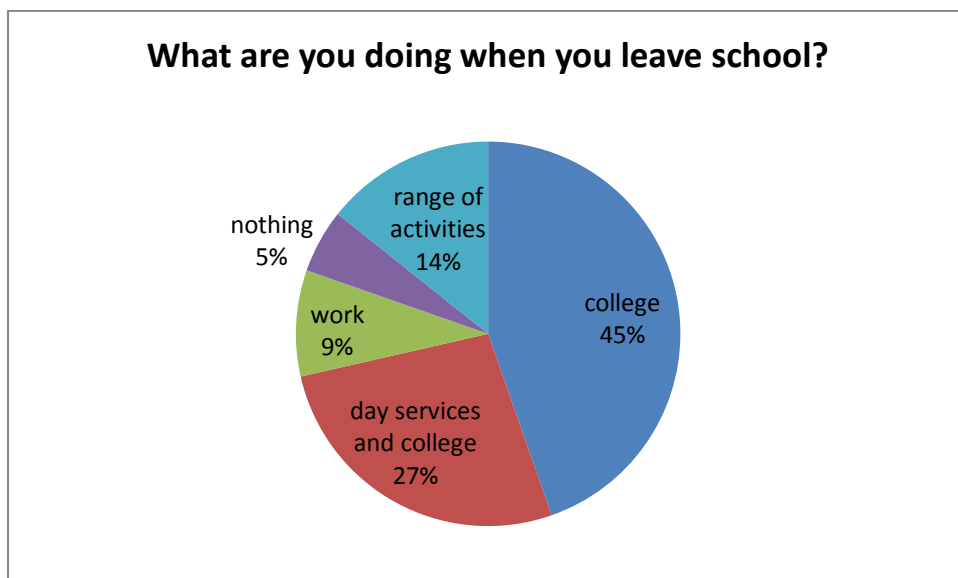
'I did not want him to go to college cos he is vulnerable and you don't get that one to one support at college.'

All parents are supposed to attend transition meetings, but of the 8 we interviewed, 4 said they had not been invited and 2 had to insist they attend.

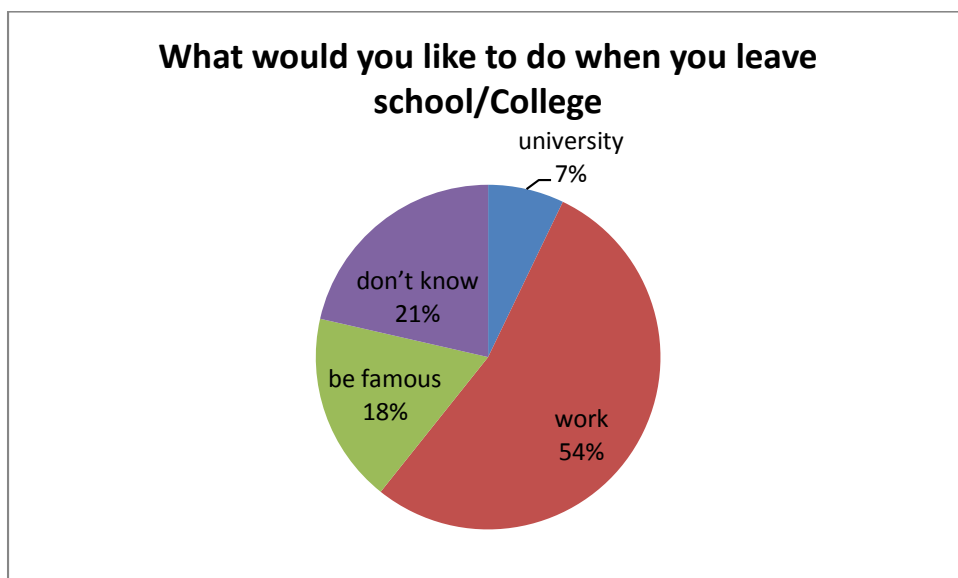
During the workshops and interviews we did collect some quantitative data, be it from small numbers of people. The questions we were asking were a combination of context for our characters and stories, along with content and opinions about transition. The results are summarized below. The young people on the whole were positive about their experiences at school. They were fairly evenly mixed between those who did not want to leave school and those, who were sad to leave, but were ready and excited to move on.



Both of our questions about school were mainly to set the context for the play and also to gain the trust of the young people by first talking about something concrete and very familiar to them.

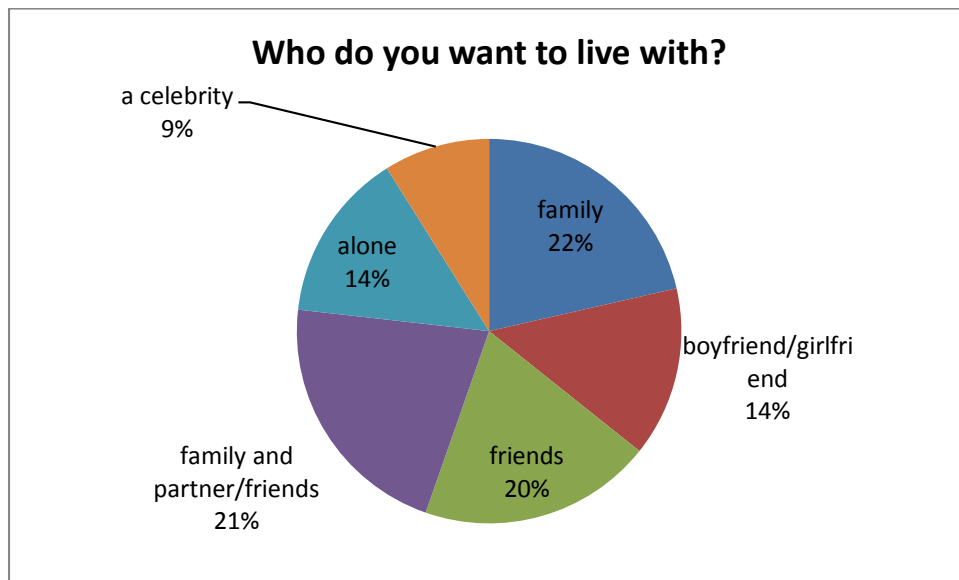


The choices the young people made seemed to be mainly dependent on their ability and where they lived: for example, all the young people in a school in Haringey are encouraged to go to the local sixth form centre, and then make further transition decisions from there. In Enfield, there is a parent run day service provision: many of the young people, who went to the same school as the child of the manager of the day centre, went there, combining it with 1 – 4 days at college. The parents felt very supported at the service, which seemed to be the closest link to the support they had received at the school.

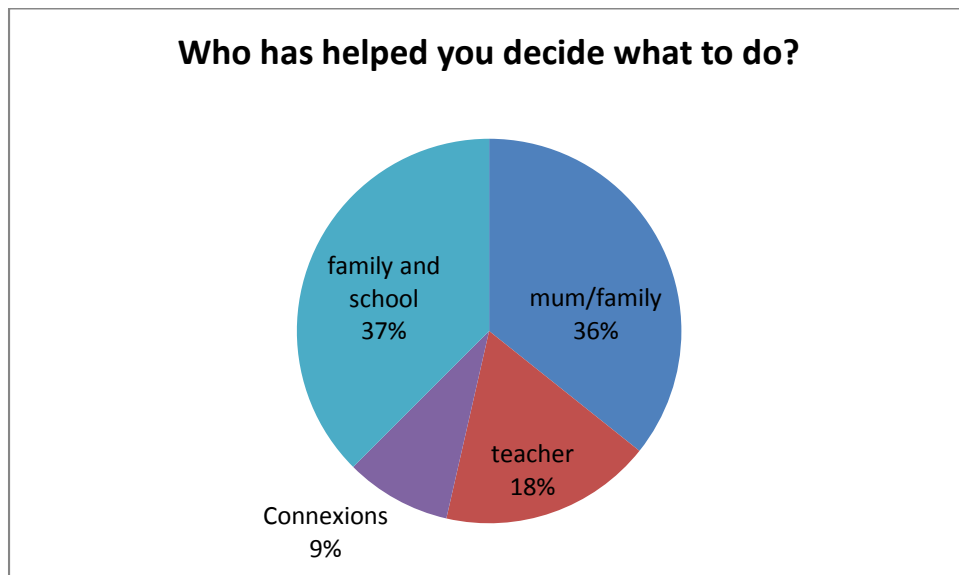


The college students we interviewed were understandably much clearer about their answers than the school students, who were more focused on the next stage of college, work or day services. Of those who said work, many did not know what kind of work, a few had unrealistic projects (e.g. be rich, own a night

club) and some had low expectations (e.g. sweep up at a hairdresser's, washing up in a restaurant?).

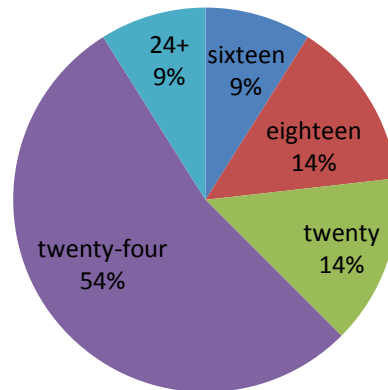


Of those who said they wanted to live alone, the majority were on the autistic spectrum. The majority expected to live with their families for ever, whether that was with their future partner and children, or not.



Most of the young people expressed that their families had helped them to decide what to do. Very few were aware that there had been a particular meeting, where they could express what they wanted.

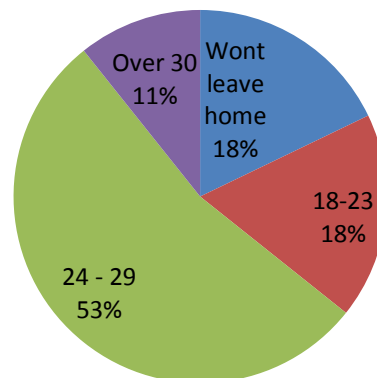
What is the right age to have a relationship?

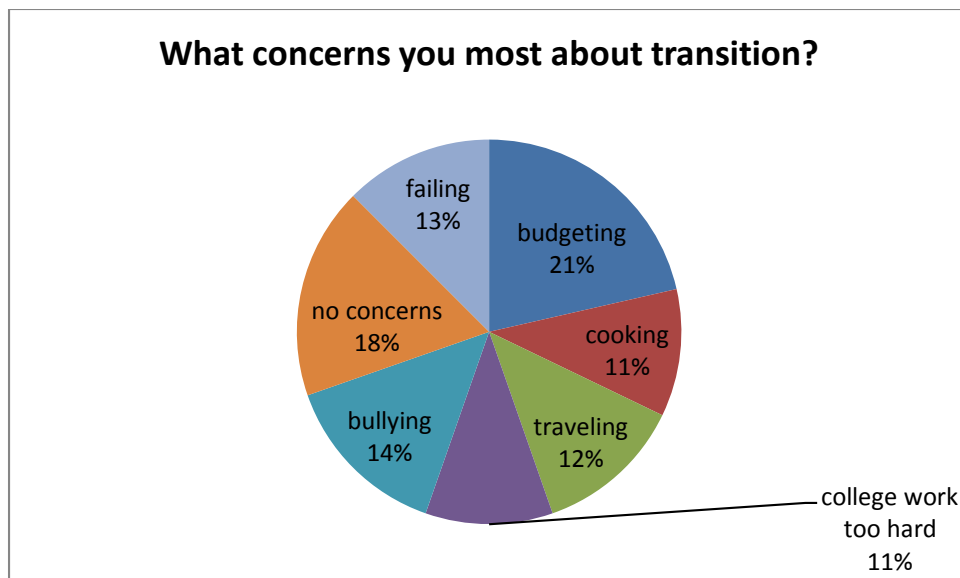


Many of the young people seemed to think that 24 was the age that you could live independently, and the age it was acceptable to have a girl/boyfriend.

Many of the young people could not conceive of leaving home, across all the age-groups. Of those that did, the most common age to leave home was again 24.

What is the right age to leave home?





The young people varied from those who were extremely anxious about the whole process of transition and moving on, and those who appeared not to be aware that the change was going to happen, so therefore had 'no concerns'. Following further discussion, it became clear that they were not making any choices, because they expected the teachers and parents to do it for them. They were unable to comprehend the changes ahead.

We want to be able to help young people and their parents nationally, so decided that rather than focusing on specific options which will be different in different areas, we would really look at how to make and express decisions, and for the parents and school staff how to listen and really be an advocate for what the young person wants.

In terms of transition experience, we found that the other group of people who were very helpful was our own creative team of LDD artists.

The inclusive theatre process

One of our areas of research was testing the effectiveness of our inclusive process. We wanted to work with arts partners from across art forms, who were based across London. Part of the process was also to develop the skills of the LDD artists and so each artist was accompanied by a mentor from their art form from their home organisation. This part of the process was over 15 days in total.

The artists did not know each other, so the first sessions were about making a creative and safe environment: finding inclusive ways of working and getting to know each other. Each artist was given time to share their work and also space to be

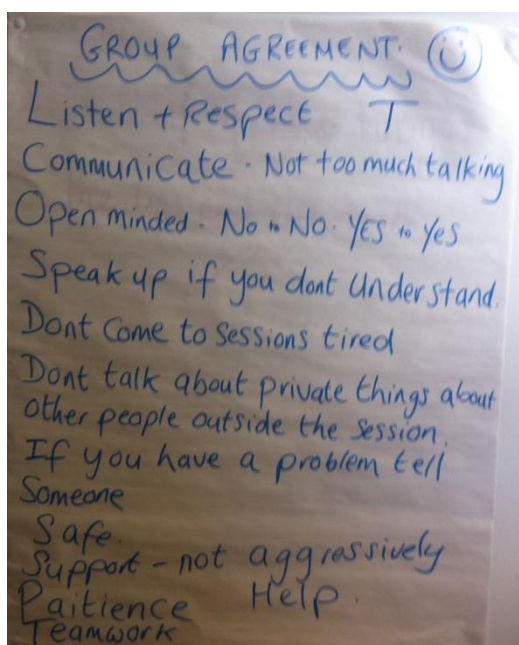
heard about their ideas and experiences. On the first session, we collaboratively drew up a company agreement of how we would work in order for everyone to be productive (see picture).

We wanted all the artists to work across all the art forms at the beginning of the process, in order to understand the multi-layered and accessible style of the play. One particularly successful exercise was where the team were split into groups of 3 or 4 with people they did not know and together they were asked to perform their names through music, movement, drama, sign and visual art. Some groups chose to share their work with one art form a time, others put them all together. It was a great way for the team to get to know each other and a good start to work towards accessible, multi-layered art. At the end of every session, we gave time for every

person to feed-back their thoughts which could be spoken, drawn, danced or sang. Initial feed-back included:

'It's great that we take our time to do it step by step.' Aldean Blair

'Performing our names integrating music, voice, comedy, sign and art was a valuable template for our play.' Kat Gill





'The dancing was brilliant.' Francis Majekodunmi

'The drama, seeing the different reactions from parents was interesting.' Declan Leslie

'I liked helping to making the set, I have never done that before.' Peter Faventi

'There was an element of surprise from everyone – things people contributed and performed that we did not know they could do.' Julie McNamara

'There was so much joy and laughter in the room – a wonderful creative experience.' Shelly Davies

We then moved on to devising the show and this was done by explaining the key findings from the research with young people, and giving time for the LDD artists to go through their own transition experiences. They were all either going through transition events, like moving home, or had recently been through transition. A safe environment was provided for them and they were very forthcoming with sharing their experiences. They had the luxury of hindsight or some had the understanding that comes from direct and current experience.

'My Mum wraps me in cotton wool, it would be very difficult to leave home.'

'Mum speaks at the yearly meeting but Mum keeps saying my son thinks this, my son thinks that and it makes me shy. Sometimes she says what I want and she's right but sometimes she's wrong – so I say what I really think when she moves the car!'

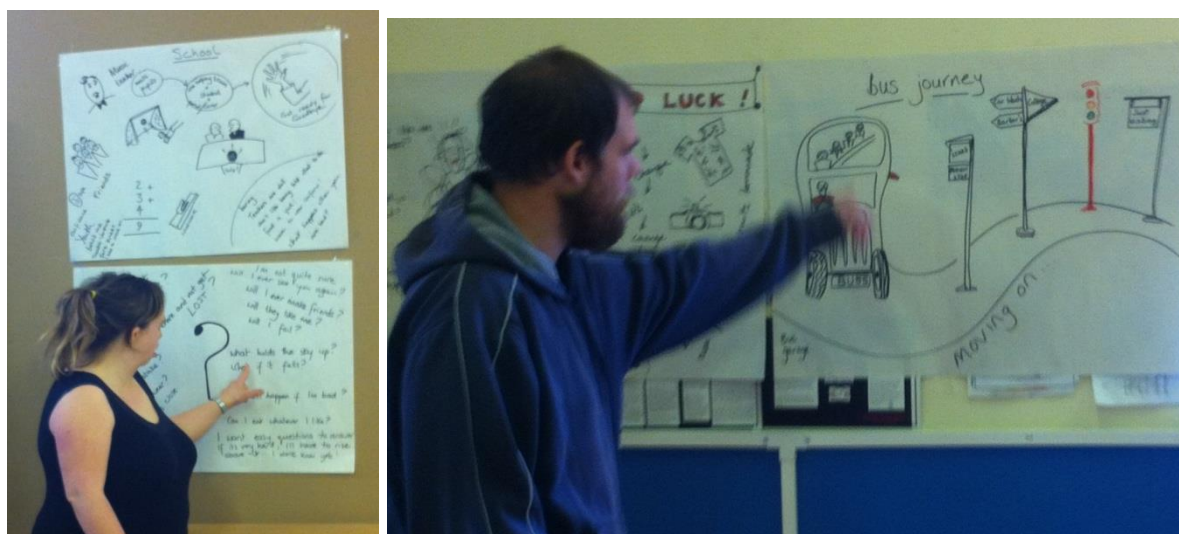
'There is a BIG CHANGE, I am moving out on my own – I have confidence inside of me.'

'Moving out is exciting and scary.'

'People might call me bad names for no reason – it has happened before – I might be scared if I lived away from my family.'

'My brother is moving out and a friend moving in with me, but I don't want to lose my brother, we were in a twin buggy when we were small, I don't want to lose him.'

The sharing of stories built trust within the group and also helped the artists to have a personal investment in the production. Once these stories and the research from the young people had been digested, the LDD writers along with the writer's mentor and director began to experiment with different storylines, pulling out the common themes. In order to make this process accessible, the notes were made out of pictures and words. Again, each person was given space to speak or show what they thought. The LDD artists then shared these ideas with the rest of the group and, in so doing, took on leadership roles. It was fascinating to hear their explanations of the storyline: it helped us to decide what ideas to use, through what was significant and memorable to them in the re-telling.



Once the storyline was roughly agreed, the piece was broken down into the different elements, so the dancers spent time with the musicians choreographing and composing a piece about leaving (home and school) and the travelling song. These pieces were created by the LDD artists, trying out ideas, which were shaped by the Blink artistic director Kat Gill. Once Aldean Blair the LDD composer had agreed the music, he and his mentor Ned went away and recorded the music to accompany the dance, as a soundscape for the drama and to record backing tracks for the songs. At one point in the devising, one of the dancers began to cry, affected by the music and the subject of leaving – this then affected the composer, who also became upset. We had a discussion about how they were feeling and both agreed that it was a positive experience, working through anxieties about leaving and being moved by the beauty of the music and dance. It was important that they each had mentors that they knew well, who were available to support them emotionally, as well as practically and artistically.

The drama scenes were created through 'hot seating' characters, i.e. asking the actors in character about aspects of their lives and then forming improvisations around their answers, of which some were chosen to be turned into script.

Once all the elements of the play were created, 3 of the LDD artists along with the writing mentor and director had a couple of sessions to create an outline script. The final week was spent rehearsing, in order to show to young people in schools.

The process of creating the play was inclusive, in that it did include everyone's ideas. The LDD artists and young people were the force that created the play: everyone had a mutual respect and felt that they belonged to the team and to the project. However, the process was not as inclusive or accessible as was wanted due primarily to practical reasons: specifically, not having enough time with the team, and the difficulty with some of the non-disabled artists to step back and facilitate, rather than lead.

Time and other commitments were the biggest problems. All the artists had a multitude of other commitments, so it was impossible to find enough time to come together to process all the material and write the scenes. We had planned for Peter Faventi to be a co-writer – to write through improvising and story-telling. Ellen Goodey was going to co-direct, but both these artists were not able to give the time necessary to take on these leadership roles completely. This meant that the non-disabled artists had to make more decisions than was originally planned. We discussed the possibility of having a residential, if the project could be developed, so that all artists could commit to a period of time on the production. We would also meet over a longer period, in order to work at a productive pace for the LDD artists, so that they are able to really take the lead in directing and writing, in order to redress the balance of power and create a piece that is suited to the target audience.

On the question of redressing the balance of power, it was important for some of the non-disabled artists to take on the role of mentors, rather than artists in their own right, which was very challenging at times, when they got excited by the ideas and processes and raced through their ideas, unintentionally taking over the creative process. It was important to take time to make sure that everyone in the room had a chance to voice and agree on ideas, and for the mentors to put the artists with LDD first. So, is this inclusive? Or is this Learning Disabled Arts? We think that until the non-disabled artists can learn to go at a pace suited to LDD artists, there cannot be a truly inclusive process.

Another challenge was that the mentors, who were there as creative partners, were also taking on the role of support worker. The role included them travelling from their own home to meet their mentee, which increased their travel time considerably. The mentors were also supporting with practical and emotional needs through breaks and lunchtimes. So for any further work, we would make sure to employ support

workers to help with travel and breaks, so that all team members can function equally as artists.

Development of artists with Learning Disabilities/Difficulties

Due to the exclusion of LDD people from formal arts training, it was important to the project to develop the emerging artists that were creating the project, both to develop our inclusive process and to ensure that the end result was right for the target audience. It was important that the LDD artists had a genuine voice in the devising and rehearsal of the piece and in that way the mentor system worked well, as each artist had an advocate.

The set designer, Declan Leslie, who came from *Action Space*, was very shy at first. He had never experienced theatre making before, but was chosen because of his work in 3D, his creative outlook and potential in the field of set design. Declan began by going on a few theatre trips to learn about the purpose of the set in theatre. When he started with the project, he was drawing his ideas in the corner of the page, quite small.



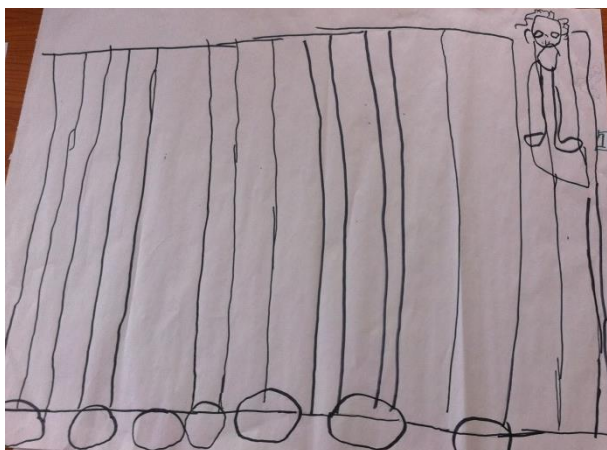
The whole company worked together to create set ideas out of materials found in the rehearsal space, including making a playground from chairs, tables, ladders, bits of fabric and buckets. It was a great bonding exercise and the result was that all the company began to think how the set could be integrated into the story to strengthen and support the meaning of the play, especially for young people who use more non-verbal communication.

'We did fun games like make a playground. Made a pretend slide and a park – I thought it was a good opportunity to do something different.' **Peter Faventi**

As Declan did more work he gained confidence and began expressing his ideas. He volunteered to explain the story so far to the team and did so with incredible enthusiasm:



As Declan's understanding of the task grew, so did his confidence: he began to draw bigger designs, which then turned into the set design for the show.



Declan also joined in the whole process by contributing his own experiences of transition and also by playing the squeeze box in rehearsal, adding to the creativity of the piece. We would like to include Declan's musical ability, when the play is developed.

At Riverside school, Declan explained the set design with a demonstration model, in a 'loud voice' to the whole audience of about 40 people. He also explained how he made the bus stop, sign and bus, which were the key elements of the set made for the 'sharing'. At the end of the project evaluation, Declan said how he had learnt about theatre, about making big drawings and 3D structures, in particular how to make the bus stop and bus. He really appreciated the input of the other artists and loved the dance, music and scenes with the parents. He very much enjoyed working with his mentor, Shelly Davis, although at this stage, he sometimes said that he was helping her, rather than taking on the leadership himself of the design (even though the key ideas came from him). However, the other team members were clear.

'I liked the way Declan made the bus. I liked the way he brought it to life. He was the main set designer.' **Ellen Goodey**

'Declan really has some good designs and he is a very, very good drawer, so when he drew a bus stop and other drawings I looked at them they were really, really good. I tell you what surprised me – I was so happy to say this that he really spoke up to talk about the set. That is the first time that I heard Declan speak up about the set – I was so surprised to see the box (set model) – I know it's small but you can take it from the box and make it real.' **Pete Faventi**

Declan's mentor Shelly enjoyed the whole process, which was very new to her: coming from a graphic design background, she was used to working from a brief, rather than through an inclusive organic process like ours. She said

'I was a little frustrated at the beginning, not having a brief without the goal posts changing – but once I understood, I could go with the flow and it was refreshing – great working with different groups of people with different talents I was so blown away with how talented they all were.'

She noted how much Declan had grown throughout the project and fed-back how his new confidence was showing at his work, back at *Action Space*.

'Now Declan is working bigger and bigger and always smiling.'

Pete Faventi and Ellen Goodey from Face Front are both experienced performer/devisors and had previously worked together on a number of performances, including a national tour to theatres of a multi accessible play. The difference for this project was for them to take on more leadership roles. Ellen was therefore to be the co-director as well as performer, and Pete co-researcher and writer. Both took on their roles, led the acting warm-ups, and contributed ideas throughout the process. However, due to both of them being involved in another production, and Ellen also doing a performing arts diploma, they did not have much time to invest in the process: some decisions had to be made when they were elsewhere. It was decided that if the show is to be developed, the planning happen enough time in advance, so that all the team can give it the time it requires.

Faventi had never taken part in interviewing for research before and it left a real impression on him:

'We went to different schools to talk to the pupils about what transition means what it means about moving on.'

He learnt how the information the young people gave us could be used to develop character and script. He also processed how the 'hot seating' technique used in devising helped to create and develop character:

'I thought about this in bed last night – all the different stories we got to put into the show helped us to develop the characters in the play. And the outcome of doing that – in a bit more detail, it's like Ellen's character Melody – it's not just about Melody, it's about what transition means – moving on from school to college to be free to do whatever classes they want to do.'

Goodey took to both writing and directing with vigour: she would come to every rehearsal with a new poem or song idea, and with ways she had been thinking about to direct scenes.

'I remember being your co-director for the very first time and helping to direct scenes that I wasn't in, like Warren's scene – and helped with the dance movements. I did the hot seating going from character to character, until we made my character and I wanted to develop the character of Melody. I led warm-ups and wrote songs and I am still writing songs.'



Aldean Blair came from *Heart n Soul*, in order to compose and play the music for the production. He was mentored by Ned Smith, who had known him for years and was in a band with him. Blair had never worked in theatre and at first was expecting to sit at the keyboard all day to compose and play. He was a bit surprised to be drawing, acting, dancing and sharing stories of transition, but he really excelled in every area, once the purpose was explained to him.

'I like it at Face Front. It was like a training at Face Front.' **Aldean Blair**



Aldean was very passionate about his role, creating not only songs, but a soundtrack to the show:

'I was doing the composing and keyboard playing. I was watching how the play goes. I was doing the music, just like the movies and make sure I get it right – this is my first time – I am the first and only person to do the sound track for "Heart n Soul". I can't believe it!



As mentioned above, when Blair was creating the music for the dance scene, where the character of Ade is leaving home, both Blair and the dancer cried. Blair interpreted the strength of their reaction as follows:

'I was touched by the emotions – touched by the sad music – it was hard for Francis. He feels too emotional because my music is so powerful, because I can make them cry and make them happy.'

Using music to create emotion was new for Blair, who was used to performing in bands. It really developed his understanding of how music can be used in theatre.

Blair also learnt about working as a team in a professional environment. At first, he tended to think that his music was the most important element of the show, but as the project progressed, he began to understand that his music was complementing the action and that all elements were equal: he gained a great joy in that.

Ned Smith, having worked with Blair for years, had an established a strong relationship with him: this helped the process and enabled Blair to flourish. Smith said:

'Aldean is so fast, sometimes I do play an active role, but I learnt to take a back seat and Aldean to lead the music and trust in Aldean.'

Smith managed to walk the fine line of supporting and facilitating Blair's creativity, whilst enabling Blair to truly lead the music.

Francis Majekodunmi and Delson Weekes from *Blink Dance Theatre* came to lead the choreography and dance in the production with their mentor Kat Gill. They had never collaborated with other artists and art forms in the inclusive way of this project. Majekodunmi said:

'The play was fine. We've not worked with a live musician before, not worked with set designer before.'

And Weekes added:

'We enjoyed performing to young people.'

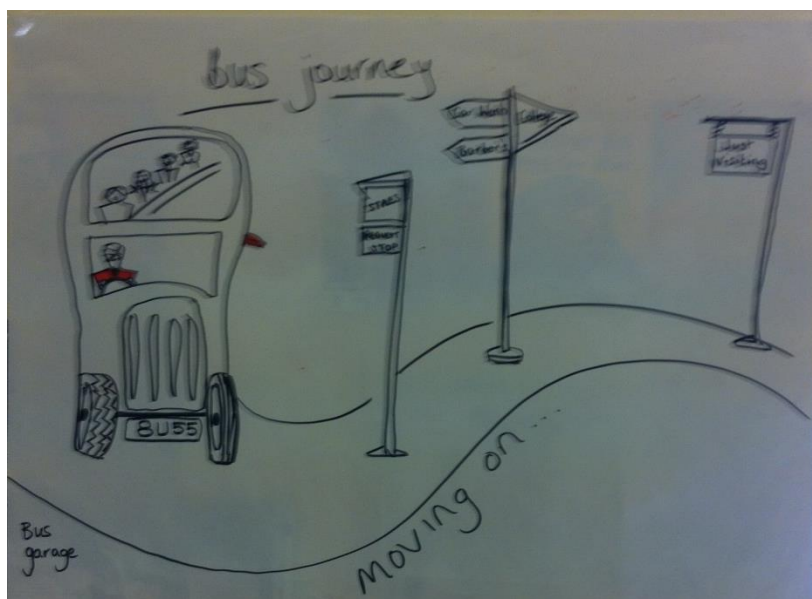
Gill knew the two LDD performers well and said:

'Being part of big team worked well. They felt at home, took ownership of the place and the work. They don't always get so involved, especially if it's going over their head, but here they had high level engagement.'

Majekodunmi is very articulate and would tend to dominate the discussions, but did learn about turn taking and listening, as the project progressed. He is a natural leader: he did begin to do pep talks before the shows and took on the role of director and spokesperson for the group, which was welcomed by the rest of the team. Weekes is mainly non-verbal, but he also took the lead, running physical warm-ups and directing the team through physical gestures and sounds. The *Blink* team created the movement for the piece and worked organically, having a brief discussion as to what might be needed, then got straight into devising through movement – crafting the dance by choosing the most appropriate movements and building them together. The movement ideas were mainly from Majekodunmi and Weekes, but due to lack of time, mainly crafted by Gill.



Synopsis of the play



The performers enter, singing about their journey on the red bus – symbolising their emotional transition journey and also, for some, the journey to independence. The bus driver then introduces the first stop: – ‘school.’ We find out what the characters and audience think about school, leaving school and what to do next. We meet Melody, who is a ‘people pleaser,’ happy to do anything, but aware that she must do what her Dad wants. Ade is a confident young man, who wants to be a famous performer, his old friend Finley wants to be a mechanic, while ‘Worried Warren’ is scared of all the changes and does not know what he wants.

‘Worried Warren’ aka Peter Faventi

‘Melody’ aka Ellen Goodey



The play then follows each character. First, we meet Melody, who clearly loves hair dressing, but her dominating 'Dad' has decided that she will study cookery. She tries to speak, but he does not listen. The audience then discuss how she is feeling and whether her father is listening.

The next scene is in Warren's house with his over protective Mum, who is 'ever loving, smothering, mothering.' She wants to do everything for her son and is frightened about him going into the big wide world. He is full of questions and anxieties, but does not share them with his Mum. The scene combines non-verbal communication through dance and audio description, as well as drama, with Warren's questions.

'Will I make friends? Find a girlfriend?

Will it be rough? Will I get bullied?

What if I fail what will I do?

Will I succeed and see it through?'

Next, we see Melody and Warren visiting college. Melody finds an old friend and enjoys the visit: she is thrilled to find out she could do hairdressing, but reluctantly goes to the cooking, because that is what her Dad wants. Meanwhile, Warren gets very lost and confused in the hectic college. He finally finds the ICT department and thinks he would like to do this subject.

The next scenes were planned, but there was not enough time to present them. Ade finds out he will have to move out of his parents' house and live independently. if he wants to go to drama and dance college. Finley tries out work experience and decides that he wants to be an apprentice mechanic.

We then move on to the transition meeting: Warren is totally confused by all the options his teacher puts in front of him and is then pressurised by his over protective Mum to take the safest option of day services, rather than going to college. This is the point where members of the audience are asked to intervene and take on Warren's part, to speak up for him to let his Mum and teacher know what he really wants.

The audience also helps Melody to talk to her Dad, with a volunteer getting up and acting her part to let her Dad know that she really wants to do hairdressing.

The next scene is shown through dance, as Ade packs his suitcase helped by his parents.



Finally, we have the school leaving party, where the young people say and dance fond farewells. The play ends with the audience joining them in a last celebratory dance.



Work in Progress sharings of 'It's My Move!' (Working Title)

The team performed the interactive piece of inclusive theatre about transition at the 4 venues we originally visited for research. The audience consisted of young LDD people, professionals and parents/carers, who were then interviewed in small groups to gather feed-back on the presentation, in order to assess the impact of the play and to develop the piece for the future. There were 140 people in total for the 4 performances and 45 people at King's College London.

We went to:

- Stars Day Services for young people aged 18 – 25years
- Oaktree Special School working with young people from 14 - 19 years
- Finchley Youth Theatre with Barnet and Southgate College students from 18 - 25 years
 - Riverside Special School with young people aged 14 - 16



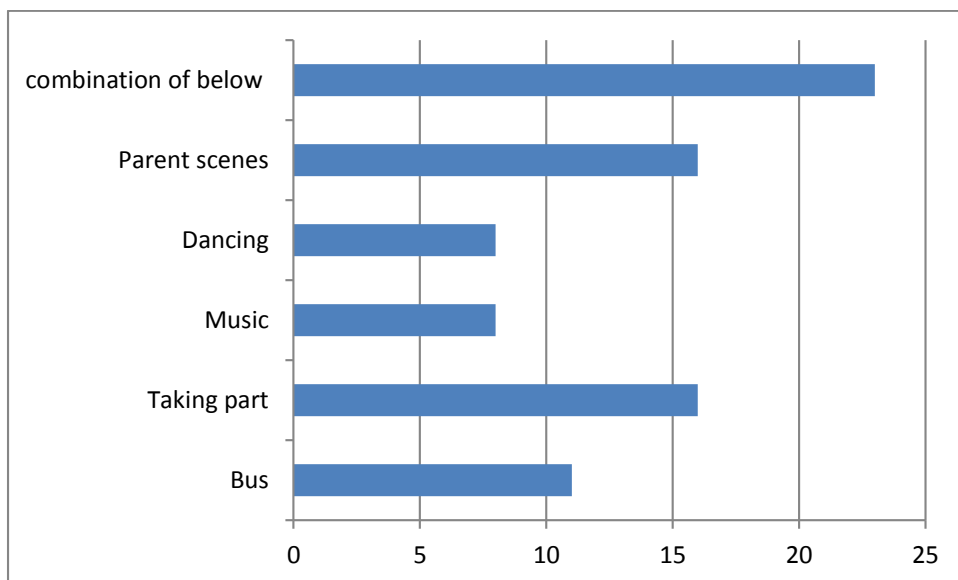
We also shared the work at King's College London with Sam Rhodes school students from 16 – 19 years, and guests working in the arts, academia and transition.

The audience responded very favourably in all the venues: the

flexibility of the interactive sections meant that the production could be adapted to the differing abilities of the audiences. During the interactive sections, the young people responded very well. We had some wonderful moments when volunteers from the audience got up and spoke out for our characters, helping them to express their wants to parents and teachers. Overall, the audience was extremely positive about the production thus far, with adults saying how they were moved to tears and recognised their own behaviour. They loved the humour, the characters and both young people and adults thought the interactive sections were very effective. The young people loved the singing and dancing, the scenes where the young person speaks up for themselves, and clearly related to the material.

Following the performances, we got some helpful feed-back. We asked the young people:

What did you enjoy about the show? They replied:



We asked adults the same question and they replied: the interactive elements and seeing the audience so engaged, being able to see and understand the worries of the young people, the parent scenes, especially how hard it is to let go as a parent (a situation so familiar to parents and teachers), the humour and the emotional intensity.

'You kept their attention throughout.' **Teacher**

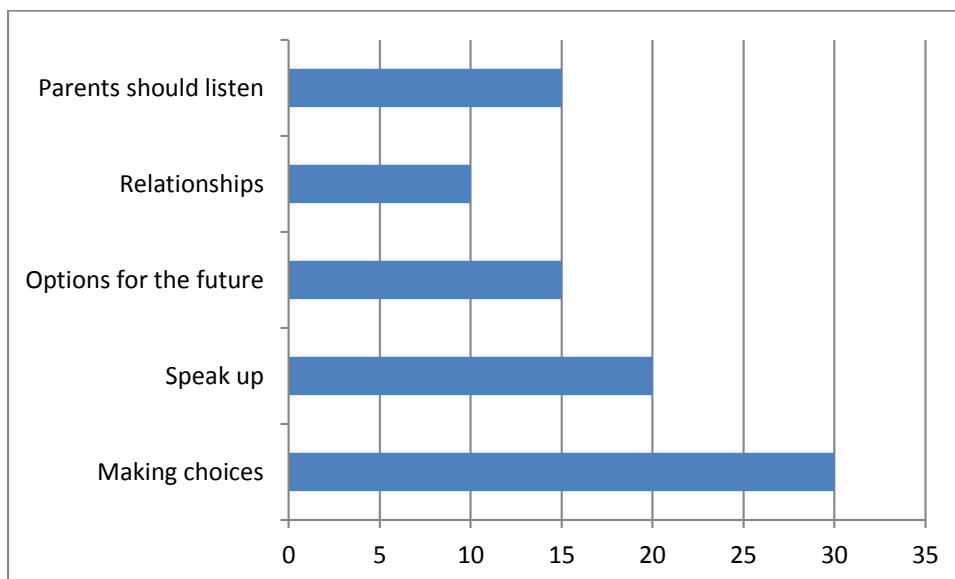
We then asked questions to establish if the young people had understood the play and followed the storyline and main message. They were able to tell us about the dilemmas of the main characters and were clearly relating to them. They knew that the young characters were being dominated by their parents and that they should speak up. They sang the 'bus' song to us, and described or showed us the music and dance that they enjoyed.

'The participation was brilliant and right music and tone for the audience.' **Parent**

We also asked is the production right for your age. The young people all thought that it was. The adults said that for those with Severe Learning Disabilities it would need to be simplified, some felt it may have been a little childish, but said that the young people clearly enjoyed it. At the college, the lecturers felt it was more suitable for the young people, who had just come to college rather than those who were leaving college.

We asked if everything was correct: were told that there should be a Connexions advisor at the transition meeting and that the professionals attending the meeting would be based on the level of need of the young person. It was also suggested that we include more about parents, who are not interested in their transitioning children, and a young LDD person who is very anxious and really does not know what to do. We could include a child who is in care, as that is quite common for disabled young people, and it was also suggested to include peer pressure on decision making.

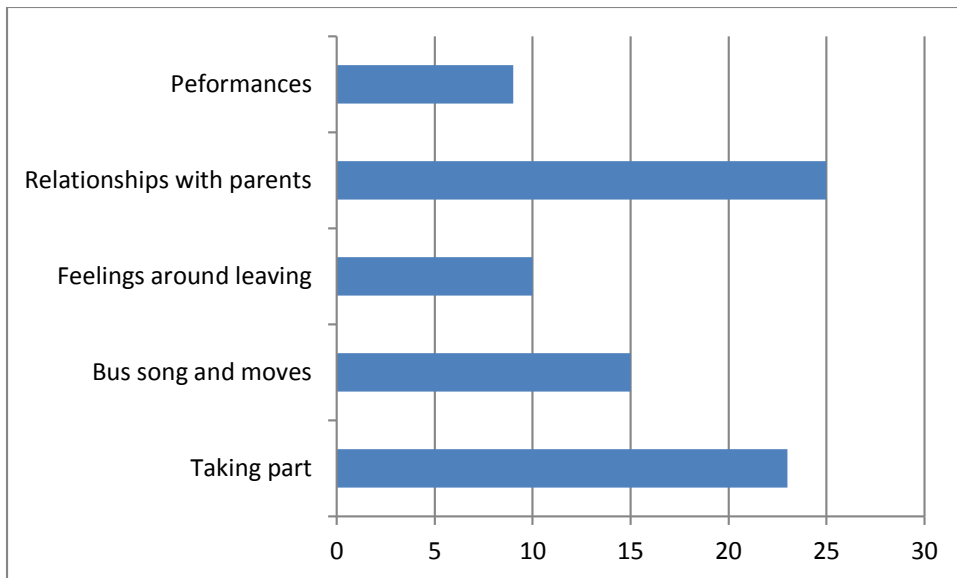
When asked what they had learned the young people replied:



'The young people learnt skills to make their decisions for themselves .The parents learnt skills as well – skills to help their children make their decisions.' **Ellen Goodey**

Parents said they learnt how hard it was to let go of their child, but that although it is painful they must help them move on. A senior social worker said she learnt about how the young people see and experienced transition and has learnt to pay attention to their emotional journey, as well as to the practicalities.

In answer to the question “what will you remember from the play?”, the young people replied:



Following the performance at King's College London, where the audience consisted of some disabled young people along with academics, arts practitioners and transition professionals, we received comments through post-it notes, through a Q + A session, and also from comments collected after the event.

The presentation was appreciated by the audience and a flavour of their responses is presented in the next section.

Feed-back

How inclusive/accessible was the presentation?

'I felt that the presentation did include those with more mild-moderate learning disabilities to those with more limited communication skills. However, I felt that the presentation would be more inclusive in the future if young people with more complex health needs were included and that their experiences were addressed. As previously stated on the day, young people with complex health needs and looked-after children have completely different transition pathways to those with mild-moderate Learning Disability, for example. Maybe this could be addressed in future presentations and productions.' **K. Saddler, Transition professional**

'I did think that the combination of verbal and nonverbal communication within the production was good and accessible to those who are nonverbal and/or with hearing difficulties. Not only does it contribute to accessibility, but it also reflects the needs of young people with learning disabilities who are nonverbal. As we know, professionals can sometimes assume that a young person who is nonverbal, does not have feelings or opinions about how they want to be supported.' **K. Saddler, Transition professional**

'I think there are some challenges with doing theatre in the round and audibility which could be looked at but it was definitely inclusive.' **Paul Bonham, Arts Council**

'Very inclusive and accessible.' **Stephen Israel, Arts Practitioner, Sussex Theatre**

'I felt the presentation was accessible on lots of levels. As the performance is aimed at young adults moving on from school, I did wonder whether some moments felt like they would be better aimed at younger children and some young adults may find it 'childish'. However, I was watching the young people who attended that it was aimed at and they seemed to be very engaged and to be enjoying it, so maybe it was pitched fine. I really liked the set pieces being used as this added to the accessibility but were part of the creative vision.' **Vicky Tweedle, Arts Practitioner, Spare Tyre**

How impactful do you think the theatre was on the learning for young people, their families and transition professionals?

'I think that it was clear that parents/carers and professionals learnt a lot from the production, especially the parents. However, maybe there needs to be more emphasis made on demonstrating how transition professionals could improve their practice. The production seemed to impact the young people as they were able to demonstrate their personal experiences of going through transition to adulthood. I am sure that the young people involved in the production developed confidence and self-esteem whilst being involved.' **K. Sadler**

‘From the extracts I saw, I thought the work would be really strong in meeting this objective, and also fun. I liked the multiple stories. I remember feeling equally as pulled during my transition stages as a teenager.’ **Paul Bonham**

‘Always impossible to quantify this categorically, especially as it will effect different people in different ways. However I can say that it impacted me, and it opened my eyes to new questions that I had not thought of before.’ **Stephen Israel**

‘I thought they piece would have a strong impact as it is exploring some really difficult areas in people's lives that a number of different people are having to deal with – professionals, family members, young people with disabilities. I can imagine it having a very strong impact and empowering young people as well as enabling parents/professionals to think differently. I think its really important for them to be involved in the process too. In the feedback session I thought that one person's point about presenting strong positive examples of how parents/professionals could react was a very valid one – enabling them to change attitudes as well enabling young people to have a voice.’ **Vicky TweedleT**

The Quality of the Learning Disabled Artists

‘I think that the quality was very good – all of the artists seemed very confident and there were many talented artists involved in the production! (I liked the musical artists).’ **K. Saddler**

‘I thought that the main two actors were very strong and focusing on these stories is a real potential strength for this piece. For the learning disabled actors that needed more supporting I thought this was done naturally and creatively. I also thought that the actors from the audience were also great!’ **P Bonham**

‘I thought the Learning Disabled artists were great.’ **S.Israel**

‘I thought they were excellent performers performing to professional level, and it was great to see them performing in this piece to which they were clearly bringing in their own experiences to the performance and so could act as positive role models for the young audiences it is aimed at. I noticed that they didn't perform during the 'forum theatre' moments, which I wondered about as they seem to be very capable and would be great to see them interacting with they young people in this way, again being role models. Perhaps this is being developed in the different parts of the story that I didn't see here.’ **V.Tweedle**

WHAT YOUNG LLD PEOPLE SAID:

‘He wants to be in charge of his own destiny.’

‘Brilliant participation.’

‘The message is personal choice and taking control of your life.’

‘You are helped to make choices for yourself.’

‘It would be bad if someone just told you what to do.’

‘The play was about changes, what we want to do in our lives and about parents and teachers telling kids what to do.’

‘Moving on means saying good-bye to your friends but people need to move on.’

WHAT PARENTS SAID:

‘Brilliant – I need to look in the mirror I need to think about how I treat my boy – my young man.’

‘The Energy of the performers and engagement of the audience was fantastic.’

‘I have learnt how important it is for parents to listen and not assume.’

‘The leaving home scene brought tears to my eyes.’

‘I liked it that it showed what is possible, that it had elements of fun and was not too intense. I learnt that I am a bit like Warren’s Mum – it’s very hard to let go, it’s a little bit painful to see it – it’s so real.’

WHAT TEACHING STAFF SAID:

‘Travel is central to all our young people and it was brilliant that you used the bus as a main element of the play.’

‘Young people clearly understood the story and main themes from their feed-back and related well to the characters and dilemmas.’

‘The participation was brilliant – right music and tone for the audience.’

‘I will remember the quality of the actors and the letting go of the parent and child.’

‘You covered a lot and held their attention throughout, which is very unusual.’

WHAT TRANSITION PROFESSIONALS SAID:

‘Excellent really good inclusive production combining the audience both watching and getting involved. It was really useful to hear directly the views of the young people – We get lost in the practicalities, the play helped me to realise we need to

learn to understand their emotional journey and not be so clinical. I particularly liked it that you showed the young people that they can do more than one option – they can do college, leisure activities and day services each week.’

‘This piece would be absolutely perfect for our pre-voc course for 16 – 17 years who struggle with the transition.’

WHAT THE ARTISTS SAID:

‘Everybody’s talent was encouraged and brought out and everybody was totally motivated to do the best they could.’

‘I learnt about how theatre is made – I spoke with a big voice to everybody to tell them about my ideas.’

‘I was doing the composing and keyboard playing I was watching how the play goes - this is my first time – I am the first and only person to do a sound track for *Heart n Soul* I can’t believe it!’

‘I was touched by the emotions – touched by the sad music –the music is so powerful because it makes them cry and makes them happy.’

‘We went to different schools to talk about what transition means what it means about moving on. To be more independent and about freedom to do things for ourselves and that’s the message we got across to the schools that we went to.’

‘The young people learnt skills to make their decisions for themselves - the parents learnt skills as well – skills to help their children make their decisions.’

FROM THE POST-IT NOTES AT KING’S COLLEGE LONDON:

Can drama make an impact on the transition experience for disabled young people?

- Definitely! It really brings to life the anxieties and contradictions that parents/carers and young people face in transition.
- Absolutely! Brilliant for young people and adults to experience real lived experiences, and get to forum them as well. More of this!
- The idea that in theatre everything is up for grabs, can be fun and changeable, might transfer onto the changes in ‘real’ life.
- Yes! Through allowing situations in which young people can take agency over their own futures and articulate their ideas on this important moment of their lives.
- I like the way it can allow rehearsal – a place to try out, to try again.

How inclusive was the presentation?

- It was great that actors were very flexible and adapted to the responses of audiences and new participants, making the element of participation very inclusive.

- The inclusion was very important so that young people with learning disabilities can access and take part in an activity that supports their transition into adulthood.
- Important for mixed audiences to see and experience this. The themes would resonate with all teens going to college.
- I noticed sympathy and identification as a way of engaging (not just seeing/hearing/understanding but feeling).

Other comments

- Music brilliant! More of this. Would love to see some projection on the set as well.
- This needs to be seen around London and across the country.
- I think there are a lot of adults who miss the support as young people and children can attract more funding. A play for older adults would be received well.
- Incredibly moving for all audience members. Very 'Brechtian' style of theatre, thought provoking.

5 tips for inclusive working

- 1) **Time:** make sure there is enough time to let the LDD team members work through ideas and genuinely lead. This will vary depending on the individual artist, but as an approximate, at least 3 times longer than you would give those without LDD.
- 2) **Support:** All team members will support each other, but use separate staff for the practical and emotional needs of the LDD team members (travel, lunch, problem solving, etc.).
- 3) **Rules:** Make a creative safe environment by establishing ground rules first – include specific needs so that each person can reach their potential.
- 4) **Experiment:** Go with ideas no matter how 'off the wall' they may appear. Sometimes LDD artists come from a different perspective to those without LDD and the most innovative ideas will come from this process.
- 5) **Trust:** Trust your LDD artists, they may express the ups and downs of the making process openly, but they can be pushed as hard as their peers without LDD. Trust that they can be challenged and although sometimes it may seem like they are not progressing, they can then take a big leap.

FUTURE

Face Front have now got a strong artistic and evidence base to build a full production around transition for national touring. Some valuable partnerships with national transition organisations have been established, including the Council for Disabled Children and their Transition Information Network, in order to provide training on the legal framework of the new reforms alongside Face Front's production.

All the arts partners and artists are committed to developing the project and have gained skills.

The project will go through another period of research and development to include both content and artistic ideas gained from the 'staging transition' project. Master classes and on-going professional development training will be offered to the LDD artists. The LDD artists will continue to take leadership roles and will develop the piece ready for a tour across Britain.

Face Front, Kings Cultural Institute and Dr. Maria Vaccarella hope to continue to work together in the future and use the results of the national tour to answer our original questions and gain more evidence that drama can help young people in transition and share our findings about the theories and processes of inclusive practice.

Appendix 1

Creative Team (LLD Artists)



Pete Faventi: LDD performer and co-writer from Face Front, who has been in over 10 Face Front local and national productions over the past 14 years and is leading his own Arts Council funded project. He is also a member of the Blue Sky Actors at Stratford Circus and has performed with Strathcona.



Ellen Goodey: performer and co-director is an independent LDD artist, who has worked with Face Front on 3 productions, as well as with Theatre Venture, and on her own Arts Council funded work. She hosts the kicking Kangaroo club, is a member of the Blue Sky actors, is on the Creative Minds committee, is a member of Corali and is attending the Diploma in Performance Making at Central School of Speech and Drama.



Delson Weekes from *Blink* has been training and working in theatre and dance for over 10 years. He has studied Performing Arts at Putney College of Art and City of Westminster College. He was also part of the band '1st Chancers', who had 3 albums and toured the UK. The band was involved in many high profile campaigns and festivals, such as the 'Stay Up Late Campaign' and Liberty Festival. He is currently teaching a weekly Inclusive Street Dance class, is an apprentice dance facilitator and mentor for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities at Hammersmith Adult Learning and Skills Service.



Francis Majekodunmi from *Blink* is a dynamic Street Dancer and a talented writer. He studied Performing Arts (BTEC) at Westminster College, and Dance and Performance at Hammersmith Adult Learning and Skills Service. He has a keen interest in rap and attends weekly rap and song writing classes at 'The Gate' Arts Centre for people with learning disabilities, who he recently performed with at the Tabernacle Theatre in Notting Hill. Francis has also taught and facilitated dance workshops at

Golborn Youth Club. He has completed a Diploma in Performance Making at Central School of Speech and Drama. Francis also trains and performs regularly with both Acting and Amici Dance Theatre, based at the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith.

Declan Leslie from *Action Space* has been part of the Cockpit Tuesday Studio



Group for five years. He came to *Action Space* with an established practice, which he has continued to develop. He is always interested in exploring new things and really likes discovering new talents within himself. In addition to painting and drawing, he has done pottery and clay work, model making, sculpture, photography, and he plays the accordion as part of an orchestral trio. He has a very unique and distinct style. He has a lovely piece in the "Carriage through Time" exhibition at London Transport Museum at the moment.



Aldean Blair from *Heart n Soul* has been involved with *Heart n Soul* since 2008. He is a highly proficient keyboardist/pianist and has taken an active role in our *Do Your Own Thing* music sessions, where he has had many opportunities to perform at *Heart n Soul's Squidz Club*. Aldean has steadily progressed through the organisation. He has been a peer mentor for *Do Your Own Thing* and is currently a member of young 'rock/ punk/ funk' band, *The Radical Raccoons*.

Mentors to the above artist's and co-collaborators included:

Annie Smol: Artistic Director, *Face Front Inclusive Theatre* – Director/Researcher

Julie McNamara: Artistic Director of *Vital Xposure* – Writer/Researcher

Katherine Gill: Director *Blink* – Choreographer/Performer

Shelly Davies: Freelance Artist at *Action Space* – Set Design mentor

Ned Smith: Freelance Artist at *Heart n Soul* – Music/composer mentor

Andrew Bradford Photographer

Selection of interview transcripts/notes.

AT SCHOOL

Mother:

'She's doing really well here. But I do worry. She's just so vulnerable.

No, she wouldn't have survived at college. They had this meeting right, and she'd said yes to all these things she wanted to do, that she could do. An' they'd put her down for I.T. you know, a computing course. An' she can't do that. She can't even operate the hand controls for the game station. She just says yes to everything. If she thinks you want to hear that. She's a good girl, you know she just wants to make you happy. But she don't even use the remote for the TV. So I told them off. They should've had me in that meeting because I'd be able to point out when she's just saying yes. I know her best, you know. No she's all right here. But you do worry as a Mother, you know.'

Mother:

'He is my life now. We came here for better support for M. He is a big boy now. And when he left school we were very worried what will happen to him. Where will he go? Then I got very stressed. M was very low. He gets very sad and then he gets angry. His father left us. Yes he left me after 30 years. (Cries) And he has not seen M since he left school. This makes M sad. He doesn't understand you know.

But I think *he* does not deserve such a beautiful son. He is special you know. M loves it here. No, he is not here today. He does something else on Wednesdays. He's happy here. But I get very depressed you know. It's a lot to manage on my own. He is my life. I will always look after him.'

Mother:

'You have to fight for everything. I pity those that don't know the system, honest to God I do. My boy was suicidal. He was worried the whole time running up to leaving school. He says to me one day - 'What will happen if I just walk in front of that bus?' I realized then how serious he was. He was so worried. Then he blamed me. He says to me one day: 'You didn't love me did you? If you loved me, you wouldn't have made me like this. Why did you make my head like this?' He wanted to go to college to be with the big boys. He likes Music, he always wears his headphones. But he doesn't realize people get annoyed when you are singing out loud on the street. Not

everybody wants to hear you. He thinks no one can hear him when he's got those headphones on. He's doing all right now. We got a mixture of college and day services. But we had to fight. Three Transition meetings he's had. The nonsense one, where nobody took account of 'im and they certainly didn't invite me. The next stage after I'd complained. And they think you're giving them aggro. Then the one where they let us know what was going to happen and they says to B: What do you think? And he says straight into her face. 'Don't matter what I think. You're supposed to help me. But I don't know what you've got written on them papers'. He'll tell you what he thinks. And he knew he hadn't been included.'

AT COLLEGE

Father:

'Well, my wife came here first. She took up a course here to do a recky for our girl. 'Cause we was both worried you know. My wife suffers from depression. Suffers terrible she does. And erm, well I'm using mental health services. (We shake hands...)

So we are right behind our girl. But we get dismissed you know. I think it's because we're already on their radar. My wife got suicidal after the way they treated her in one of them meetings. They dismissed her and suggested her 'anger was inappropriate' and she was getting distressed so they dismissed her, they disregarded her. We was worried about H... and she was trying to put her views across and they was so dismissive. See H is 23 and she appears very capable. But she's very vulnerable and we were worried about predators quite frankly. You can't watch them 24/7. I daresay she is sexually interested but she doesn't know how to protect herself. She is so easy to please. So they dismissed our concerns and H was sexually assaulted. I watch her like a hawk nowadays. It's scary you know. But they just weren't aware how vulnerable she is, because of the way she presents you know. You can think she is so much more grown up, capable you know. She likes the drama and the other classes she does Cookery and she does Computing and stuff like that. She's very happy here. But them meetings. It's a stitch up. We weren't asked to that Transitions meeting? See it's all about money. We might have flagged up that she needed support getting to college, that we had concerns for her safety. Well they don't wanna hear that - because that's gonna have budget implications isn't it?'

AT DAY SERVICES:

Parent:

'She won't get an education here no qualifications but at the end of the day with no disrespect to my daughter I can't see her progressing education wise anyway. So whatever she's learnt at school, that will be it – Apart from life skills which will be continuous. That's more important for her to learn – when I am no longer here she will be able to look after herself and not need anyone else.

I haven't seen her do anything that I can turn round and see and say she can do that in the future – all she likes is her laptop and One Direction. She shows no interest in art – I really don't know what she can do – is that horrible? Really probably stacking shelves in the supermarket – something where she can follow simple instructions. Too many instructions and she gets confused and bottles up.'

Parent:

'Issue with transition it's not straight forward they don't understand the amount of support S needs. When my husband died I needed to work to do something to keep my mind off it. Sometimes S gets home before me I tell him to lock the door. He is sensible he knows danger, with limitations. To me he take everybody the same he is very friendly I don't know if I underestimate him. He don't know how to treat family different from stranger. On the bus stop, on the bus he make friends he has so many friends – people start to talk to him.

He wants to go to college – later on when I retire I will be at the college to help him.

My theory is he is vulnerable and friendly so the other boys will see he vulnerable and they will use him. But he say he can look after himself. But I'm concerned just that vulnerability with strangers

He could have a relationship regardless of the disability – but if it be his choice you have to take into consideration his partner because he is vulnerable and need to be checked

Meetings – about transition steps me and Simon came – The last one we went to Simon was very vocal and said what he wanted, but if I thought it was dangerous I would say no. Like he wanted to go to college, but I said it was dangerous.'

YOUNG PEOPLE AT SCHOOL

Male:

'I will leave school when I'm 19 I am 18 now. I want to go to College and Stars. They do work at college but we went last time, Southgate college that's where we went –

We went to the building there were lots of people there I want to go to do work I want to know about people leaving school.

I just want to know do their Mums and Dads take them to college? I would love to go to college, I have never been on my own.

I just want to know if I can go on a bus? Where do I go on the bus? I want to but my Mum wouldn't trust me to go on the bus on my own but I really want to. I might get in trouble if the bus driver was cross with me and he might say where's your Mum? But I do want to go on my own.

I'm gonna miss all the people at school. I feel happy to go to college because there are lots of people.

I just want to know what do they do at college? I just want to know?

I just want to know how to make friends? Will the teachers talk to me about that?

I'm worried about making friends – I might get in trouble and I'm worried they might be silly. They do laughing. If they laugh about people's names, that's not nice.

I just want to know where do the students go, do they go to college or do they go somewhere else, where do they go?

Where can I work? I want to do building? Where can I do the job? Do you know? I want to do the windows, build the windows.

I'm not sure if I had a meeting to choose what to do.

How do people get money? I need to learn where they get the money ? What do you do with the money? My Mum has the money. But you know the money? What if it gets lost? Can you put it in your pocket? I can't do the bills on my own my Mum will do it.

I don't know where to go after college?

I want to go you know to a different house with my friends with 3 friends boys and girls. I would like a boyfriend and a girlfriend.

I can't have a baby, boys don't have babies –

Where do people go when they get older? Where do they go shopping? I can't cook, I don't want to burn myself, that's the only thing. My Mum says you don't want to burn yourself she says - it's too dangerous.

I didn't ask my Mum or Dad if I could have a girlfriend or boyfriend I didn't talk to them about that. I haven't told her.

I've got loads of friends at school

In my old school the teachers shouted at me so I told my Mum I wanted to leave. Teachers shouted at me for work I did it wrong. I felt happy to leave my old school. My friends are still there I see them.

I play outside after school –

At home I watch TV I don't go out after school. I'm not sure what I do at the week-end.

I need help if I live on my own, I didn't ask my Mum My Mum would help me.

My Mum might stop me if I do something wrong.

Where do people go when they get bigger and bigger what do they do?

I just want to say something if I cross the traffic lights on my own what will happen? I just want to know will I get in trouble? Is it dangerous? What if people go by themselves? I have to cross the road with my Mum. So I can't cross the road on my own, is that right? Is that right?

I worry about sometimes I don't want to go home because I have nothing to do at home. I want to go out somewhere but I don't know where to go.

I like to listen to Turkish music.

I'm not a little boy I am a man now.

Where do you go in the half term? The teacher's haven't told me?'

Male:

'I want to be Barber like my brother.

After school I will go to college do work and get a girl friend and I will live in my house with my Mum, Dad brother and sister or with my girlfriend and I want a boy baby. I feel good about going to college – my Mum goes to college. I will do GCSE maths, see my friends, go home go to bed and then eat.

I'm going to teach myself how to cut hair. I work in the Barbers and I do sweeping the floor and cleaning the tables, they give me rich money. I work after school.'

Female:

'All ladies came to my house and they talked including Angelina about what will happen next and she said I can go to Enfield college –

I don't get worried about anything. I'm frightened about college it might be work is too hard. There will be a teacher to help me. You go inside to have lunch and then the buzzer goes beep beep.'

Male:

'I will work in a car wash, it was in the newspaper so I go for it and its done one of my social workers found the job and told me about it. At transition meeting they said car wash, they did not tell me about other jobs. That's all I can do

I don't want to go to college, I get bullied a lot. They come up to you and say give me your phone, your key your wallet. No one has done that to me before.

I will live with my Dad and brother and sister.'

Male:

'Mum took me to Vincent house to look at it for me to move out and live by myself.'

YOUNG PEOPLE FROM DAY SERVICES

Female:

'I live with Mum and Dad – I would like to live with friends we will eat and drink together.

It was easy to go to college I just said hello then made friends – I don't worry about anything.

I want to always live with my Mum.

I want to move out one day, with someone from One Direction – or a boyfriend.'

YOUNG PEOPLE FROM COLLEGE

A newspaper advert said 'one college many successes' so if you come you would gain something – I said to my mum and Dad that I wanted to go.

Mum helped me to find the college and now I walk on my own – I like walking on my own.

Every November I had a meeting with my Mum and careers advisor - would I like to work or 6th form or a place in college? – Connexions decided for me – I was not confident to come to college it's not like school it's not like a proper school – you can wear what you like here. That's what I like – I didn't like wearing a uniform at school.

I was trying to make decisions that would be best for my future.

Mum took me to see the tutor to meet her at college.

What do you want to be?

- I'd love to be a teacher that's all I want to be.
- I want to be an actor.

- I want to live in a big house with my Mum and Dad, I'm not ready to go out into the big wide world yet.
 - There probably would be a time but not yet – preferably when I get over 30 then I would be comfortable.
 - I do like mansions but I've never seen one before – I would live with Mum and Dad and friends – I'm not sure about living without Mum and Dad.
 - I want to live in a flat with my family.
 - I'd like to live in London in a big house (not a mansion) with friends and girlfriend.
 - I've had a crush – I had a chat with her but I blew it! There were people all round me I was too nervous – I need to have a chance to get a girlfriend – I have tried with 5 I might want a daughter because I hate football I would want 2 girls.
 - I definitely want kids as many as possible – if I had a daughter I would spoil her.
- Life is special when you are growing up

Sample of Online media presence

THE LONG AND BUMPY ROAD

Posted on [December 16, 2014](#) by [James Crawford](#)



Maria Vaccarella, academic lead on [Staging Transitions](#), a collaborative project with inclusive theatre company FaceFront and the Cultural Institute at King's, reflects on her progress in bringing a new, inclusive theatre performance to the stage.

A big red cardboard bus carries the characters in *It's My Move!* from one scene to the other: it's a vivid metaphor of the 'bumpy ride' towards adulthood for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD). Rather than being an ordinary, everyday event, jumping on a London bus on his own was the immediate, tangible sign of independence for one LDD teenager we interviewed for *Staging Transitions*.

What became clear in our preparatory interviews with LDD teenagers in transition was that, despite a widespread call for transition planning to be 'person-centred', young people feel disempowered – faced with overwhelming, often rushed, information sessions and overprotective parents, teachers and carers. The play we're developing thematises all these issues: its very title – the exclamatory 'It's my move!' – emblematically focuses on the need to acknowledge the budding independence of young LDD people, as they prepare to leave special schools and children's services. In order to ensure the play is a genuine and useful reflection of the transition to adulthood, LDD artists were extensively involved in the creation of the play, from the original soundtrack to set design, script writing to choreography.



FaceFront Theatre

Over the last few months, FaceFront facilitators and artists have brought the play to special schools and involved pupils by means of improvisation exercises to practice their self-advocacy skills. Our interventions were in line with Davis and Behm's definition of creative drama intervention as 'an improvisational, non-exhibitional, process-centered form of drama in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact, and reflect upon human experience'.¹ We hosted one of these research and development exercises at King's last month, bringing together colleagues from across departments, transition professionals and arts practitioners to witness the lively interaction between FaceFront artists and LDD pupils from Samuel Rhodes School in Islington.

Coming from a medical humanities background, I'm aware of the successful inclusion of performance studies in medical education, but what our project demonstrates is the potential to use performance in patient education as well, and not only in a strictly clinical or medicalised environment. *It's My Move!* explores LDD people's hopes and fears around their transition into adulthood by setting up a creative arena that by definition will yield much more nuanced responses than any ordinary research questionnaire. Inclusive theatre projects are also a great way of exploring what disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland Thompson calls 'the giftedness of disability'.² Opening up to LDD people's non-normative approaches to reality and moving away from normalising aesthetic tendencies could also enrich current theatrical practice, as well as expand our notion of what constitutes a successful performance on stage and beyond.

Staging Transitions is looking at new ways to help young people with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) handle the transition to adulthood.

¹Davis, J. H., & Behm, T. (1987). "Appendix 1: Terminology of drama/theatre with and for children: A redefinition". In J. H. Davis & M. J. Evans (Eds.), *Theatre, Children and Youth* (pp. 265–269). New Orleans, LA: Anchorage, p. 262.

²Garland-Thomson, R. (2012). "The case for conserving disability". *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, 9(3), 339-355: 354.