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for Children's Care and Protection



We are Citizens!

An evaluation of the We are Citizens! Ensemble care experienced theatre company project

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Table of Contents

The concept.....	2
Who's who.....	3
Project aims and evaluation	5
The beginning: A taste of professional theatre	8
The hard graft: From page to stage.....	12
The applause	15
The dream: The future plans.....	20
Conclusion.....	23
Notes and References	25
Appendix One: Timeline	26
Appendix Two: Audience Feedback.....	27

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The concept

"It gives everyone a big opportunity to do what they love surrounded by people who can make it possible."

- Young actor involved in We are Citizens! Theatre Company

"Children don't need a system that just stops things happening to them - they need one that makes things happen for them, a system that supports them to become the people they can be.....One that gives them a sense of family, of belonging, of love."

- Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister for Scotland (Launch of the Independent Care Review at SNP Conference, October 2016)

In 2018 the Citizens Theatre, in partnership with CELCIS, was awarded funding from the Life Changes Trust's Creative and Active Lives initiative, to establish Scotland's first professional theatre company for young actors with care experience. This was a bold and ambitious project. The vision was to establish, develop and nurture a unique Theatre Company for the many diverse voices of young people enabling them to be listened to, heard, and celebrated for their artistic talents. The idea started from a social justice perspective. In Scotland, there are around 15,000 children and young people currently in care, and many more who are care leavers. The strengths, capabilities and resilience of young people who have care experience can be extraordinary. Their abilities to overcome earlier adversities in their childhoods can lead to an inner strength and determination to succeed. However, too often they face many barriers. In general, care experienced young people currently do not achieve the same level of qualifications as their peers, leave school earlier and are less likely to progress into education, employment or training. Accessing creative opportunities can be particularly challenging for care experienced young people and building a career in theatre may seem like an impossible dream.

It was the sense of unfairness and inequality in accessing creative careers that led to a funding application to the Life Changes Trust in December 2017. In recognising the talent of so many care experienced young people, we felt strongly that we had to create more opportunities to be a springboard into creative careers. To our absolute delight, Martin Travers (Producer and Playwright, Citizens Theatre) was immediately receptive to the idea, and we started planning over tea and cake with the fantastic Citizens Theatre Learning Team. The project has grown from strength to strength, starting with open drama evenings and taster workshops, to young people travelling from across Scotland

to participate and work with professional theatre artists. The enthusiasm and engagement from the young people, professionals and supporting organisations has been fantastic. From these beginnings, a core group of young actors established the theatre company, involving weekly day-long rehearsals, outings to theatre productions, and learning first-hand about the technical skills of a professional theatre company. The professional skill and support from Director, Guy Hollands, and from Company Manager Carly McCaig, have been critical to the Company's success.

Martin Travers' original play, 'Whatever Happened to the Jaggy Nettles?', was inspired by the theatre ensemble and published by Bloomsbury, Methuen Drama (2020) in time for the opening night. The ensemble's first production takes us back to 1978 Glasgow, with unemployment and violence prevalent, and Scotland's seminal punk band, The Jaggy Nettles, imploding. It features live music, original songs and an abundance of Glaswegian banter, and is a hilarious story of friendship, deception and the power of punk.

The play was first performed at the Brian Cox Studio of the Scottish Youth Theatre, Glasgow, on 12th February 2020. The play was performed five times, to sell-out audiences and to critical acclaim.

Who's who

The Citizens Learning Team

Citizens Theatre has been at the heart of the Gorbals community in Glasgow since 1945. Housed in one of the oldest theatres in Scotland (built in 1878), the Citizens Company has been transforming the lives of local residents and city-wide audiences through main-stage productions and community initiatives for nearly 70 years.

Each year the Citizens Theatre produce and present around 15 dynamic, innovative productions on the main stage to audiences of over 60,000. In addition, the Learning Team deliver 1,500 community workshops and activities per annum, reaching a further 6,500 individuals through an award-winning programme of participatory and inclusive education work. The Citizens believes that quality theatre is for everyone and their vision is to transform and enhance lives through performances and activities that everyone can access.

The Citizens Learning Team involved in the *We Are Citizens!* project comprised Martin

Travers (Playwright and Producer), Guy Hollands (Director), and Carly McCaig (Company Manager). The team developed a programme of taster workshops for young people as an introduction to professional theatre, led by professionals in areas such as set design, costume design, sound engineering, and physical movement. Carly McCaig, as Company Manager, provided practical and emotional support to the young actors to ensure they were able to fully participate in the theatre programme. All staff who worked directly with the young actors had PVG checks and a full understanding of the Citizens Theatre's Safeguarding Policy.

Alison McKinnon (Head of Marketing, Citizens Theatre) and her team provided mentoring and learning opportunities on marketing and promotion of professional theatre productions. Many Citizens Theatre staff who were involved in the project used mentoring techniques to be a welcoming and inspiring presence in the lives of the young actors, helping them to have the confidence to be the best they can be.

CELCIS

As a partner within the project, CELCIS (the Centre of Excellence for Children's Care and Protection), based at the University of Strathclyde, provided consultation and evaluation throughout all phases of the project. CELCIS used a range of methodologies including participatory and action research to maximise a reflective action learning approach at all stages.

Dr Louise Hill led the evaluation, and along with Dr Leanne McIver was a member of the Programme Board. Leanne and Dr Brandi Lee Lough Dennell conducted focus groups and interviews with young actors and professionals involved in the project. Thanks also to Dr Nadine Fowler and Dr Robert Porter for additional research fieldwork support, and to Richard Hudson, who provided business support and financial costings for the project.

Programme Board

A Programme Board, initially involving the Citizens Learning Team, Citizens marketing team, CELCIS, Arts in the City, Glasgow City Council Social Work Services, and Who Cares? Scotland, was set up to oversee the running of the project. The Programme Board met quarterly, with regular communications to support the work. The Board were 'hands on' in supporting the recruitment of young people to the taster workshops and ongoing support and a sounding board for any challenges arising and collaborating on solutions.

Project aims and evaluation

The project aims identified in the funding application, were:

- Care experienced young people (aged 18-25) have opportunities to be at the heart of the creation of a new theatre company at every level (including acting, writing, stage management, marketing and at board level)
- Care experienced young people have opportunities to tell their stories whilst evolving a collective identity
- Care experienced young people have opportunities to share issues that matter to them with audiences of peers and adults
- Young people will have increased participation in the wider community and in the social, economic and cultural life of the city
- The general public will have increase opportunities to hear the voices of a diverse group of care experienced young people through theatre and have their perceptions, beliefs and understanding of care experienced young people challenged.

On an individual level, care experienced young people will have:

- Increased confidence in their own abilities
- Increased self-esteem
- Been supported and empowered to develop their talents and ideas
- Increased access to employability, educational and training opportunities

The overall project aim was to develop and nurture the talent, creativity and enthusiasm of care experienced young people to realise their own personal and collective aspirations in the theatre. This would include improving the self-confidence, skills, and understanding of theatre making amongst the participants, with the view that this may contribute to their career aspirations, employability, and future development.

Participation in the project would be open to any care experienced young person (aged 18-25), within practical commuting distance of Glasgow, including all local authorities within a 30-mile radius of Glasgow. Through a professionally commissioned play, the young actors would share their theatrical work with diverse audiences, including other care experienced children and young people, from across Scotland.

The first phase of the project would involve the Citizens Learning Team delivering taster workshops to young people (aged 18-25), to enable them to engage with the project and explore aspects of theatre making at the Citizens Theatre studio. The second phase,

planned to recruit twelve care experienced young people to form the new theatre company, the We are Citizens! Ensemble. They would have a unique opportunity to explore all aspects of professional theatre-making, including acting, directing, playwriting, theatre design, sound and lighting design, costume design, technical and stage management, producing, and marketing and communications. They would also work to develop their first commissioned play, to be performed in the final phase of the project.

The aspiration was to celebrate the talents and skills of the actors in creating original theatre. The citizens of Glasgow and beyond could gain an insight into the lives and experiences of young people, helping to challenge negative attitudes and break down barriers. One hundred care experienced audience members and two hundred young people and adults would be invited to attend the performances, and there would be an opportunity to discuss the themes of the play with the cast and creative team in a post-show question and answer session. A project timeline is given in Appendix One.

The evaluation sought to monitor and evaluate the experience of participants in the development of the Theatre Company, and ultimately the stage production at the end of the project.

In addition to the specific project aims, the funders, Life Changes Trust, was keen to explore, across all Creative and Active Lives programmes, the following wellbeing questions:

- Since starting this programme, have you tried anything new?
- Since starting this programme, have you found you have people that you feel close to?
- Since starting this programme, have you changed the way you deal with problems or challenges?
- Since starting this programme, have you felt that the things you spend your time on are worthwhile?
- Do you plan on continuing to take part in activities like this? Why or why not?
- What would you be doing if you weren't here?

Therefore, these questions were also incorporated into the focus group discussions.

The evaluation was underpinned by a commitment to participatory methods. Originally it was anticipated that some of the actors may like to be more directly involved in carrying out the evaluation. Given the challenges in recruitment and level of commitment required for the rehearsals, however, this was not feasible. It was also acknowledged that their passion and energy was for the theatre project itself. The views and experiences of participants are, however, at the heart of this evaluation, and evaluation participants included the members of the We Are Citizens! Ensemble, Citizens Theatre staff, other professionals involved in the development of the company and production, and members of the audience for the final production.

Evaluation activities undertaken included:

- Discussions and other reflective activities at the end of the taster workshop sessions.
- Small focus groups with the young actors involved in the theatre company, conducted at different time points. The actors preferred small groups rather than individual interviews.
- Interviews with Citizens Theatre staff and programme board members at various points in the project, and a final focus group.
- Post-show comments cards and e-mail survey for the 'Whatever happened to the Jaggy Nettles?' audience (see Appendix Two).
- Final performance workshop with the theatre company to reflect on the production, their experiences and aspirations for the future.

The beginning: A taste of professional theatre

From September to December 2018, taster workshops for care experienced young people were held at the Citizens Theatre. These three-hour sessions consisted of general introductory drama work focusing on team building games and activities, as well as more specific technical acting exercises. The sessions were pitched at an entry level that didn't presume much prior drama and performance experience, in order to be as inclusive as possible and also because the priority for participation was potential and commitment.

Twenty-three young people attended these sessions (with fifteen attending more than one). These numbers were lower than anticipated, and required considerable promotion via local authority social work, colleges running performing arts courses, third sector organisations supporting care leavers, Champions Boards, the Independent Care Review, Who Cares? Scotland, CELCIS, and Citizens Theatre networks.

Participants had the opportunity to engage with professional theatre artists from the Citizens Theatre staff. Ailsa Rendell introduced the group to the world of theatre design and set some fun practical tasks involving the creation of visual mood reference boards for hypothetical theatre productions and miniature set design. Jen Edgar, Movement Director, explained the highly influential techniques developed by Frantic Assembly and inspired the group to create impressive and impactful movement sequences in pairs and larger groups. Finn Anderson, Composer and Musical Director, brought the fascinating world of digital loop technology into the room. The group enjoyed creating soundscapes



The Citizens Theatre is starting a brand new Care Experienced Theatre Company for 18 to 26-year olds. The company is going to create a new play to share at Tramway in 2019.

Are you interested in being a part of this? Want more information?

First meeting: September 2018

If you are care experienced and want to get involved, please contact Carly McCaig today: carly@citiz.co.uk or call 0141 418 6278

See citiz.co.uk/care for full details.

to accompany short narratives they had devised, and provided the following feedback after the workshop:

What worked well?

“Good to have free reign and be able to build up a soundscape as we wanted”

“Amazing what you can do in three hours!”

“Could have been daunting but went at a comfortable pace”

“Honesty and support within the group”

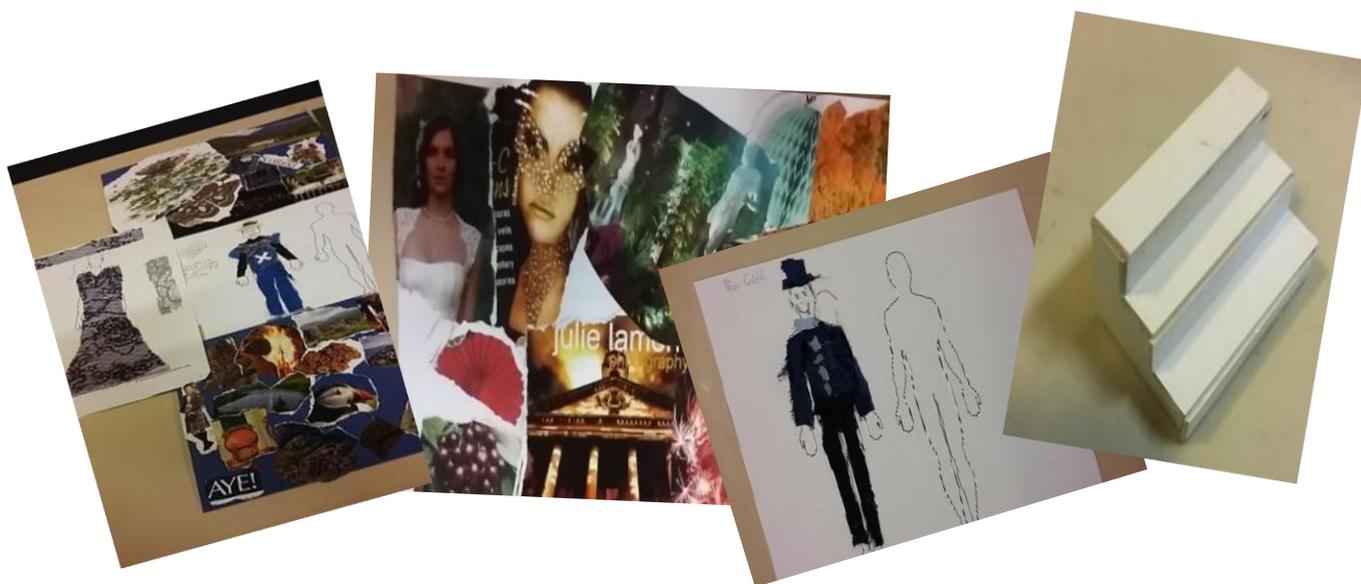
“New experiences and new skills”

It would have been even better if.....

“If more time we would have done some singing”

“Could have been more musical and seen the other side of it”

There was a key theme from focus groups of how much fun was involved in the taster sessions. This was seen to be a critical part of the success of the programme – creating a fun, welcoming and inclusive space. The depth and quality of these theatre taster experiences being provided by professionals was also hugely important. The majority of young people who participated had some involvement in drama previously (either undertaking a course at college, or school) or through the ‘Arts in the City’ Glasgow City Council programme. One participant shared that “I’ve learnt more this morning than I did on my (college) course on movement”.



Examples of visual mood boards and set design created in taster sessions

Other comments from taster workshop participants included:

“Creative, good to get a taster of different aspects of theatre!”

“Super fun”

“Loved being part of an ensemble”

The valuable learning at this stage was the level of engagement and positive attitude when the young actors were together in the workshops. However, some potential participants faced significant challenges to attending the taster workshops, or in the longer term. As highlighted by one interviewee, the level of support required for some young people to “walk into a room with people they don’t know can be immense”, hence “you have to go onto the street to encourage them, and they won’t see the stage door”. Considerable tenacity was required by the Citizens Learning Team to provide support and to encourage participants to attend the sessions, through phone calls, messages and emails.

The level of challenge in some young people’s lives was apparent through their sharing of reasons for being unable to attend workshops, including financial insecurity, shift work, and childcare costs. To counter any financial impact for participating in the group, travel costs were fully reimbursed (without requiring receipts), and drinks and snacks were provided at each session. Childcare costs were also covered, without which participation in the group could not have continued for some.

The emotional support for participation in the group, provided through experienced community drama worker, Company Manager Carly McCaig, helped to sustain the engagement in the group for a number of participants. The skills of Carly, and of Director Guy Holland in supporting friendly and positive creative spaces for the young actors to express themselves was highly valued. One participant explained “I love them, they’ve both been really helpful” and Carly is “just lovely all over... Every single bone in her body”. Supportive encouragement and an understanding of the issues facing some of the young actors has been important, and they have provided feedback that this has made them feel high levels of trust and support from the Citizens team.

Despite the flexibility and skills of the staff, some members found it difficult to attend regularly. A small number were committed to other projects for adults with care experience, and found it was not possible to maintain the level of involvement required for the theatre company. A few potential participants felt unable to commit to the

ongoing project due to mental health or family challenges they were facing at that time. The level of commitment required to be part of a new theatre company did exclude some potential participants. This raised some challenges in finding the appropriate balance between the wish to be highly inclusive, and the realities of the time commitment required to develop and perform a professional theatre production, and there were some different opinions on who could and should participate in the programme.

One interviewee shared that this felt difficult, as most of those involved already had some performing arts experience, and some young actors were already engaged in other theatre opportunities. The level of support potentially required for young people with no theatre experience to build a theatre company was a challenge.

“I struggled with the concept of auditioning – I understood it was needed for longevity but I was concerned about young people applying and being rejected.”

(Supporter)

In light of the level of commitment required, We are Citizens! 2 (WAC 2), was developed with Arts in the City as an alternative group for those unable to commit to the emerging We Are Citizens! Ensemble. The aspiration was that some young actors could participate in WAC2, and join the Ensemble if their future circumstances allowed. However, there were challenges in building a level of momentum with the WAC2 group.

Amongst those who were able to commit to the Citizens group, some reported that their involvement had helped with some of their personal challenges, and had become a highlight of their week and a real focus:

“I do like more or less nothing all week because I’m on the job centre, so this is like something to do, and that’s why, like, when I miss like a day of something, or when I just don’t come in just because of things that are far too deep for a Tuesday afternoon, I do feel bad because I’ve got like nothing on and I do want to be here ... Yeah, so it’s good to like have something to do, [...] my week is kinda empty, so it’s good to kinda have a tiny taste of a routine, because I’ve not really got one right now.”

(Young actor)

The participants all shared their excitement for developing a professional show and sharing it with audiences. Many saw this as a much bigger step than any of their previous drama experience.

The hard graft: From page to stage

“It’s exciting and we can’t wait for it to get pulled together”
(Young actor)

“One thing I noticed was how they all looked out for each other, and they seem to have become good friends.”
(Supporter)

Phase two, from January to March 2019, involved weekly day-long performance skills sessions. The group had voted for this pattern after some discussion of the best option to allow them to attend college or work, and to meet other commitments such as caring responsibilities. Generally this worked well, but it was sometimes difficult for members to attend, as a result of their individual commitments and circumstances.

The sessions focused largely on growing relationships and mutual trust within the new Ensemble, and on developing performance skills. This involved planned exercises, games and activities that sought to broaden the group’s experience and technical ability. The work was done as solo performers, in pairs, and as a whole group. Early exercises were inspired by participants’ observations of people in the ‘real’ world: the group were guided in the creation of new characters by filling out character questionnaires and writing monologues for them. Their newly developed characters were ‘introduced’ to each other in improvised interactions. The Ensemble also broached existing texts and rehearsed and performed short scenes and Shakespearian monologues.

Martin Travers, playwright, led workshops introducing the context for the new play to be created for and by the group, and tested the ensemble’s response to it. Workshops were designed to explore the setting of the play in the late ‘70s Glasgow punk scene, and to begin to map out possible characters and scenarios that might populate the world and drive the story. At the same time, films and documentaries were screened, to allow the group to explore the historical and social context of the time period, and the specific phenomenon of the musical revolution that took place, much of which was new to individual participants. Work on developing the story and devising the characters took place in the next block of sessions (April-June 2019), with a rough first draft of elements of the script produced by the summer.



The group also attended some of the Citizens professional shows at the Tramway theatre, which provided a further bonding opportunity for the group, as well as exposure to practical examples of performances and productions to discuss and learn from. Recognising the financial and practical challenges for many group members of attending theatre events, providing free tickets for a diverse range of productions has been a critical part of the programme. Given the part-time work patterns and other commitments of some members, it was not always possible for everyone to attend together, but tickets were organised for different days when possible. The opportunity to attend the professional theatre productions was highly valued and enjoyed.

The process of introducing the group to a variety of professional roles performed by members of the Citizens Company also began. Members of the Citizens marketing team described their career paths to date, their day-to-day duties and responsibilities, and then set practical and engaging real-world tasks for the group concerning the selection and use of publicity imagery. The Ensemble worked throughout the project with professional mentors in the following roles: lighting and sound (design and operation), costume and make-up (design and maintenance), stage management, set design, technical and production management, performance, and playwriting.

“They are given so many opportunities to ask what else they would like to develop. It’s coming from them, all sorts of things I would have never thought of – like puppetry – It is certainly not directive, it is coming from them which is probably why they are so engaged!”

(Supporter)

One of the objectives of the project was to provide participants with experience of the diversity of all aspects of theatre-making. A particular highlight was a participatory session on marketing from the Citizens marketing team, where the actors realised the power of images and branding for a performance. This also involved being part of the promotion of the new play, with a BBC Scotland interview.

A common theme across the focus groups with the young actors was the respect, and quality of relationships, with the Citizens Theatre team. One focus group shared that what they love about the Citizens team is ‘they value us as individuals, for who we are’. That really mattered to the young actors and that they were treated right from the start as professional actors. This was commented on by other professionals involved:

“Ultimately it would be about the professionalism that the Citz would be bring. For the young people that would be so exciting.”

(Supporter)

The young actors placed a very high value on the relationships formed within the Ensemble, sharing in focus groups the value of building relationships and becoming friends, and the strengthening of these bonds over time.

Participants were reflective on the skills being developed to become professional actors. There was a demonstrable level of excitement in being part of something unique and special. Whilst some participants were in theatre productions as part of college course, this was seen to be different and a ‘professional’ production. For some young people the academic requirements of college courses on drama had been very demanding and they were unable to continue. Therefore the value of being able to continue theatre work was immeasurable. An unexpected development of the group was their keenness to develop



musical talents, hence the performance also included instruments (bass, saxophone, and guitar) and an original soundtrack. Some of the actors had not played instruments before and learnt these for their debut punk performance.

The level of individual learning that is possible in a small group was demonstrated; for example, Guy and Carly helped some of the young actors to prepare for auditions, and one member successfully auditioned for a Citizens production. There was a commonly shared view that the experience they were participating in was 'amazing'.

The applause

"It feels like theirs, it feels like they are so committed to it"

"To see her shine was just wonderful"

On 12 February 2020, Martin Travers' original play, 'Whatever happened to the Jaggy Nettles?' premiered at the Scottish Youth Theatre, Glasgow. The performance received a standing ovation. The production ran from 12 – 15 February, with five performances (including a Saturday matinee) given to approximately 400 audience members in the 80-seat studio theatre. The level of demand for tickets far exceeded the supply, and all five shows sold out, with 99% overall attendance across the run. A number of tickets were reserved for cast members who had important friends and family in their lives who wanted to see the performance. The Saturday matinee was a closed performance for anyone with care experience, and free tickets were provided. The matinee involved a 'Question and Answer' session at the end of the performance with the cast and Martin Travers.

The press coverage was very positive, with one preview describing the production as:

"A show that isn't so much a calling card for the WAC Ensemble as a gauntlet being thrown down."

(The Herald, 30 January 2020)

The show received 4-star reviews from critics for both The Herald and The Scotsman, describing the production as "sharp as a safety pin", with performers who "blaze with personality" and "capture the heart and soul spirit of friendship, fights and fleeting moments of unity that helped define a generation's rites of passage." (Herald online, 13 February 2020; Scotsman online, 14 February 2020).



The feedback to the cast was overwhelmingly positive, with particular respect for the quality of the live punk music. The professionalism of every aspect of the production, and the stage presence and energy amongst the cast, were key themes in the feedback from the audience.

Comments from the audience included:

'Excellent performances from everyone. Clearly very well researched and well thought out, each character was completely "in" the performance at all times and gave everything to it. The story was interesting, funny and heart-breaking in equal measure. Would love to see it again.'

'Brilliant. Funny. Original. Uplifting.'

'It was fucking incredible. I am a care experienced young person myself. I loved every second of it. I have fallen in love with the cast. I can see friends, family and lovers in them all. I can see people I've known loved and lost and I can see the actors, every one of them in their characters. I'm somewhat disappointed I only bought two tickets.'

Just great! So professional, funny, heart-wrenching and such a brilliant cast!



In the final evaluation workshop, the actors also reflected on the production, and on their on-stage experiences. Their comments included:

"I don't think it could have gone better.....People after were saying they wanted to dance and sing along to it."

"I think we all forgot on Opening night how funny the script was! We have been working on it for so long....so on stage when people were laughing at things, well yeah, that was funny!"

"Great to work with such talent, there is such talent in this ensemble and you don't always find that I think. I think we are equals."

"All had the belief it was gonna be good. People were gonna enjoy it!"

"Show was great, I had complete confidence the direction was great, I had complete faith in the writing and once the rest of the production team were in place, we knew ...once we were in space it came together."

"We didn't look nervous because we were having fun."

There was a strong sense that 'everything came together' and recognition that all component parts of theatre-making are required for a success. The Ensemble members

demonstrated a real appreciation of the other actors they had worked alongside, and their generosity in sharing their skills and experience. The individual actors loved their characters and talked about their passion for them. They also shared their excitement at the set design and the technical skills they had learned. The group particularly appreciated having live music as part of the production, and the level of fun in being able to 'let loose' on the instruments.



Citizens staff shared how the 'spirit of the rehearsal room continued onto the stage' and how they were "impressed by the level of professionalism showed throughout the process, especially in the tech week [technical rehearsals] oh my goodness, this was the most straightforward.....something that the wider team made regular comment on". This professionalism and commitment was, for some of the Ensemble, at times of personal challenges in their lives: "People have soared and made massive leaps, despite all the other stuff going on." There was a huge amount of fun and enjoyment in the rehearsals which was shared by the whole production team.

The composition of the theatre company was different from originally envisaged. It was initially hoped to have a company of fifteen care experienced actors. Due to lower

numbers than anticipated participating in the taster workshops, the company later also involved actors who were not care experienced. The group reflected on their learning from more experienced professional actors as a strength, and what this had brought to the performance. The other actors who joined the production spoke about how welcomed they felt and how much they had enjoyed feeling part of the company. One commented, 'It's opened my eyes to people who are care experienced and how they have lived a different life and it's given me a better view on it'. The value of friendships and camaraderie shines through the reflections: "you knew when you came in, the community of it was just brilliant". The critical role of Director Guy Hollands and Company Manager Carly McCaig in the level of encouragement, support and practical help they provided to the group was widely recognised. It was described that they 'create a safe space' for the company members, and this allowed them to be their very best.

A theme running through the evaluation is one of identity: first and foremost, this group identify themselves as actors. Their care experience may have been part of their identity but they came together due to their passion to be on the stage. Within this though, the level of confidence meant that for some there was a sense of pride in their care identity:

"I grew up in care for a very long time and I would never tell anyone I was in care cos there's a stigma there and people would have a perception of you so I wouldn't feel comfortable sharing that... but now I do, cos I'm a care leaver and look how brilliant I am. Look how brilliant we all are. So it's really given me the confidence to say, this is who I am."

The aspiration of the project was to give significant and long-term opportunities for care experienced young people to choose a creative industries career path. There have been many opportunities arising from the We are Citizens! work. For example, one young actor has joined the Citizens Learning Team as a paid employee, running community drama events. A number of the young actors are now involved in other productions linked to the Citizens Theatre. In the final evaluation workshop there was belief and aspiration to now have a career in theatre. As one actor said: "I can do this!" Another described how she is part of a new production in March where she is singing two songs on stage. The belief of the young actors is matched by those in supporting roles:

"I would love her to have a career in this field! One young woman, very clever, very able, she is loving it, thriving in it and she could have a career in this."
(Supporter)

The dream: The future plans

"This ensemble is the first of its kind. It has been a journey for all of us, a journey for all of us, a journey that is not ready to end!"

(Young actor)

"I want this to continue because it is an amazing opportunity for people who don't have the funds for other acting opportunities. It also puts care experienced people in a safe space to live out their passion. They're actors first."

(Young actor)

"As a whole, I would love to see the company become permanent, to become established. To take ownership, obviously to be supported. To have vehicle to go out into the world and say what they want to say and have it heard."

(Supporter)

"Absolutely fantastic performance from all. Please, please, please continue to work together - the chemistry is brilliant. Really hope you can take it further."

(Audience member)

"An amazing show - full of great characters. Very funny - so much talent! I would recommend it to everyone! Take this to the Fringe!"

(Audience member)

The passion, commitment and drive of the We are Citizens! theatre ensemble has been clearly demonstrated and communicated by the group themselves. A key theme in the evaluation has been the active involvement of the actors in the creation of the Ensemble. There is a strong commitment from the Citizens Theatre and the new theatre company to continue to work closely together, not only to perform 'Whatever happened to the Jaggy Nettles?' for a wider audience, but to continue in the longer term creating more original theatre.

Members of the Ensemble gave their views on what they would like to happen next with the *Jaggy Nettles*, and whether they would consider taking part in a further run. There was significant enthusiasm for taking the story of the Jaggy Nettles to a wider audience, but also recognition that there were financial and other challenges to doing so. Company members' comments included:

"Definitely. The show ended too quickly. Best experience of my life so far. I'd love the chance to do this show and work with the team again. It needs to go further. The Jaggy Nettles are not finished showing what we are made of yet!"

"Yes, I would want another chance to do the character and the play justice. There's more to explore in this play with audience. There are so many more people (friends, family, public) who want to see the play."

"100% yes. Absolutely! I would love to do it "professionally" (maybe paid?). It is the best show I've been part of."

"ABSO-F*****-LUTELY!! I think it was excellent. I had the best time doing it [...]. I do think at some point the actors would have to be paid a proper wage as how can they truly excel as professional actors while having to worry about missing shifts, financial strain and even losing their jobs. Passion can only take you so far."

"Yes! I feel like the cast still have so much they feel they could do with the characters and have so much to learn. The only thing that would make it difficult would be to continue unpaid. The story of the Jaggy Nettles is not over, we have so much more to show."



There was also a strong feeling amongst the Ensemble that the story of the Jaggy Nettles was only the beginning, and that they have the drive and potential to continue

developing and working with new material in the future. Reflections from the young actors included:

"It gave me so many opportunities to grow and be myself and get my first start at Professional Acting. I really love this company, the members, the idea the company represents. So I'd love for it to continue."

"It is a great opportunity for young people to get together and share, create really great pieces of theatre. The group and support offered by the cast and wider Citizens has been exceptional – not only to support us in our craft both with life and struggles we face."

"This ensemble means so much to us all. Support network. A creative outlet, a safe place to work. Working with a professional team. It's the best ensemble I've had a chance to be part of."

"It gives everyone a big opportunity to do what they love surrounded by people who can make it possible."

"Whatever Happened to the Jaggy Nettles? could be the beginning. It could be that this is us just getting started. We are just getting warmed up. There's so much more we can do. More skills for us to develop as a group. And all those skills can be developed so much further."

While one supporter explained,

"I want this to continue because it is an amazing opportunity for people who don't have the funds for other acting opportunities. It also puts care experienced people in a safe space to live out their passion. They're actors first."

At the time of writing, the aspiration to perform *Whatever Happened to the Jaggy Nettles?* at the Edinburgh Fringe has had to be put on hold, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to the cancellation of the 2020 Fringe. A funding bid to Creative Scotland has been successful, and will allow the We Are Citizens! Ensemble to continue in the immediate future.

Conclusion

Too often we hear negative reports about children and young people in care and care leavers. This new theatre company, the We Are Citizens! Ensemble, offers the public a glimpse beyond statistics and stereotypes, to witness how the performing arts can create a positive means of expression, celebrate the achievements of care experienced young people, and create new spaces for discussion and debate about the issues that matter to them.

The reflections shared by the workshop participants, theatre professionals, and Ensemble members, demonstrate the extent to which the main aims of the project were met. The participants had a range of opportunities which might otherwise have been inaccessible to them, which they learned a great deal from, and found enjoyable and empowering. Examples of how involvement in the project, and particularly in the Ensemble, has benefitted the participants, are given throughout this report.

The reflections from the participants also show how participation in this project relates to the funders' wellbeing themes, including trying new things, finding people to feel close to, and spending time on things that feel worthwhile. The project has also contributed meaningfully to the realisation of the Life Changes Trust's overall aims, and in particular to Priority 1 and Priority 4. Priority 1 is that 'Care experienced young people are loved, respected, valued and listened to', and the theatre project has contributed to this by empowering and supporting the care experienced young actors to develop a new theatre company and present a professional production to a public audience. Priority 4 relates to access for care experienced young people to education, training and employment opportunities, which have been available for example through the workshops, production development, and auditioning support for participants. The project has inspired young people to pursue their passions, and supported their development of the skills and confidence to do so.

The culmination of this first phase of development of the We Are Citizens! Ensemble was a professional and well-received stage production, which allowed the audiences to experience the talent and passion of this group of young actors. There was a strong feeling amongst professionals, audience members, and the actors themselves, that the theatre company could and should continue.

Key to the development of the theatre company has been the support and flexibility of

the Citizens Theatre Learning Team, who have operated in unusual circumstances due to the closure of the Citizens Theatre building for redevelopment, which meant that finding appropriate accessible and available spaces for workshops and rehearsals around Glasgow was challenging. Their one-to-one support to help individuals attend, and the available financial assistance (for example, for travel and childcare costs), helped to address some of the barriers facing young people who might wish to get involved in such a group. Nevertheless, the requirement to commit to regular attendance for an extended period of time, to ensure the timely development of the company and production, was a barrier to some. Overall, and despite the efforts of a range of individuals and partner organisations, the number of individuals attending the workshops, and subsequently becoming members of the We Are Citizens! Ensemble, was lower than anticipated, and some reflection the reasons for this and how they might be addressed will be important for future development.

The greatest challenge for the future of the We are Citizens! Ensemble is in securing sustainable long-term funding. While a successful bid to Creative Scotland has enabled continuation in the immediate future, the COVID-19 global pandemic has had an immense impact on the arts, and the implications of this for future funding opportunities remains to be seen.

Notes and References

Copies of the original play are available to purchase:

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/whatever-happened-to-the-jaggy-nettles-9781350174412/>

Production photos are available to view here:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/citizenstheatre/albums/72157712694466381/>

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Scottish Government (2019) Children's social work statistics 2017-2018.

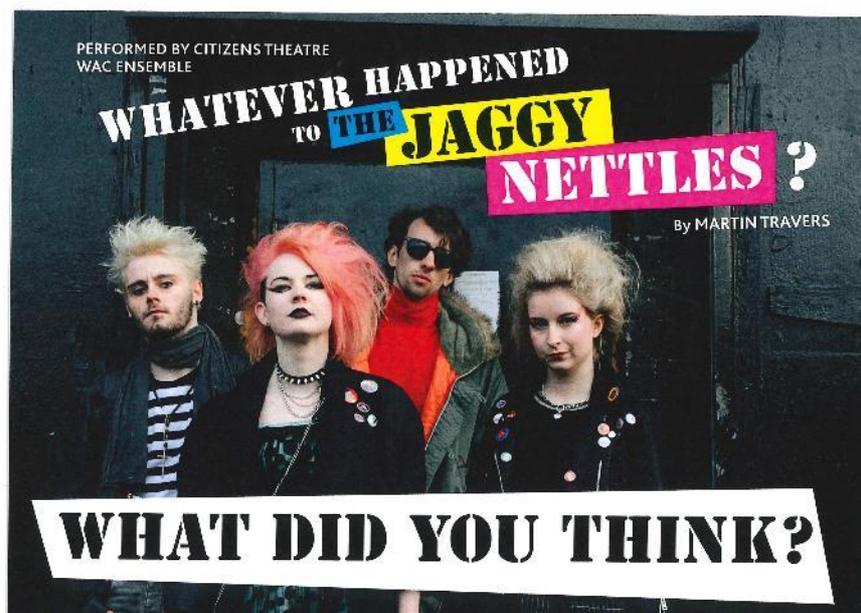
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Travers, M. (2020) Whatever happened to the Jaggy Nettles? Bloomsbury, London. ISBN: 9781350174412

Appendix One: Timeline

December 2017	'We are Citizens!' Funding application to Life Changes Trust as part of Creative and Active Lives programme
Spring 2018	Funding awarded (£120k). First Programme Board meets and planning. Publicity and recruitment strategy.
Sept-Dec 2018	Five taster workshops held – Evaluators join the sessions to meet the actors and short evaluation activities conducted.
January 2019	Additional workshops to recruit more potential actors.
Spring 2019	Citizen's Theatre building closes for redevelopment. The Citizens Learning Team relocates to Scotland Street Museum. Rehearsals held at various locations across Glasgow (including Skills Development Scotland). First performance of the ensemble – Showcase at Scotland Street
March 2019	Focus groups with young actors and interviews with Citizens theatre professionals
November 2019	Glasgow Open Care Day – Some of the ensemble compered the event and performed set pieces
January 2020	<i>Whatever happened to the Jaggy Nettles?</i> published by Bloomsbury
February 2020	'Whatever Happened to the Jaggy Nettles?' performances at the Scottish Youth Theatre, Glasgow. Evaluation workshop with actors, including performance pieces on their experiences

Appendix Two: Audience Feedback



Post-show comments cards

Very well directed and produced. Extremely entertaining!

Fucking fantastic. Caught the spirit of the time perfectly and cast were brilliant. Love the energy. Punk's not dead!

Brilliant. Funny. Sad. Poignant. Great acting. Superb energy.

Absolutely brilliant! Such energy, such talent! Loved it.

Whit a show! Captured band life tae a T and the patter wis magic!

We thought the play was fantastic. The cast were excellent. The set and music were brilliant.

Punk may smell a little... But it's not dead! What a great show!

Absolutely smashed it! I'm gonna have the songs stuck in my head for days! Amazing job.

Pure punk! Shit hot acting, bags of energy, authentic and kick-ass. Well done all.

AMAZING! So hilarious, was laughing from start to finish. Such a professional performance. Thank you!

An amazing show - full of great characters. Very funny - so much talent! I would recommend it to everyone! Take this to the Fringe!

Superb! Music, story and performances were top class. Hilarious. Fun but important.

Huge congrats to all involved. Great writing and performance. Talent so obvious. Can't wait to see what you do next.

Absolutely loved it. My era - so brought back memories. Fantastic.

High production values and passionate performances. I felt pure pride!
Thought the show was brilliant! Really funny with brilliant script!
What a fucking fantastic show. Well done all.
So good. So much fun. So much energy. Performances I'll remember for a long time.
Amaaaaaazing! Well done everyone. So funny. Music was amazing. Performances were phenomenal. Thanks!
Amazing! As an old punk, I was impressed by how authentic it seemed. Everyone was brilliant - well done!
It was truly wonderful to see young people with care experience take on such an ambitious and full on play.
Looked totally professional. The cast are so talented.
Absolutely fantastic! Amazing performances, lots of laughter and top tunes! I effin' jeffin' loved it.
Fab! Fab! Fab! The level of energy was outstanding.

Post-show online survey

Some really great performances from a cast who'd obviously worked hard on this show. It made me forget everything that happened that day and I was completely immersed in the performance. Set looked great too.

This was such a powerful and relevant performance that was funny, fast-paced and fascinating to watch. I would have never have thought this was an amateur performance. Every detail was spot on. I was mesmerized from start to finish. I would definitely have paid to watch and would buy/download original songs by the cast. Well done to all involved x

It was brilliant. Funny, believable, and enjoyable script. Good acting. Set and lighting supported the delivery.

This was a fantastic show. The music was fantastic, the writing brilliant and the acting amazing. Would totally see again.

Excellent performances from everyone. Clearly very well researched and well thought out, each character was completely "in" the performance at all times and gave everything to it. The story was interesting, funny and heart breaking in equal measure. Would love to see it again....

Excellent. There was a real sense of fun and energy about the show. The actors played the characters with conviction.

I thought the young performers did a fantastic job. The fact the parts were written with and for them really showed in their performances. They had real ownership of their characters. I appreciated the fact that the young performers were working with professional actors but that the focus very much stayed on the young performers.

Energetic, inspiring, funny and moving

Great production with talented actors it really brought the era back to life and the punk movement in Glasgow!

Absolutely superb; professional through and through and full of energy from start to finish.

It was fucking incredible. I am a care experienced young person myself. I loved every second of it. I have fallen in love with the cast. I can see friends, family and lovers in them all. I can see people I've known loved and lost and I can see the actors every one of them in their characters. I'm somewhat disappointed I only bought two tickets.

Absolutely loved it! I thought the performances were fantastic. The cast projected a real energy with their performances which created an electric atmosphere for the audience. There were so many moments of real comedy which was balanced with some poignant dramatic scenes. The set and production were also top notch complimenting the amazing individual performances. Still buzzing from last night's show - 'Mon the Jaggy Nettles!!!!!!!!!!

Really great performance by all involved, funny, poignant and well deserved standing ovation at the end

We absolutely loved it. The script was quick, witty and delivered by talented actors. Seriously impressed by the cast and the messages throughout the story. Had us howling with laughter and moved in equal measure. Loved the tunes and really felt the energy from the audience.

Characters were well written, casting great, and the actual performance full of energy and skill. Clearly a lot of preparation and rehearsal, enabling the slick, fast-paced dialogue and scene changes. Terrific use of the stage too, with the actors and a few simple bits of furniture seamlessly transporting us between different rooms and places. Music, lighting and set design were all purposeful, adding real value to the performance, but never getting in front of it. The best feedback I can give is that I was at times in the world of the Jaggy Nettles, not sitting in the Scottish Youth Theatre. I have paid lots for tickets to 'must see' shows which don't come close.

Absolutely brilliant! What an amazing experience for these young people. To be part of such a wonderful production and to have the opportunity to work alongside the Citz team could be truly life changing. All credit to the Citz for their care and attention towards their cast.

About CELCIS

CELCIS is a leading improvement and innovation centre in Scotland. We improve children's lives by supporting people and organisations to drive long-lasting change in the services they need, and the practices used by people responsible for their care.

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