

Taking Part in a Pandemic

Evaluation Report of Young Vic's Taking Part programme, March 2020 to January 2021

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Executive Summary

On Saturday March 14 2020 the Young Vic Theatre announced that performances of *Nora: A Doll's House* were cancelled with immediate effect, but the box office and The Cut bar remained open. On March 20, the building had closed to audiences and rehearsals of *Orfeus: a House Music Opera* had ceased. Rehearsal spaces, offices, meeting rooms and backstage areas were abandoned. In theatres across the country, stages were lit only with ghost lights. Theatres appeared closed for the first time since the 1940s.

On March 23 2020, Prime Minister Boris Johnson issued this instruction to the nation:
You must stay at home.

Home, History & Heritage was the theme that The Young Vic's Taking Part Programme had chosen to explore during 2020. At the time, no-one could have imagined what home would come to mean during this dreadful year. The cancelled production of Stef Smith's brilliant reimagining of Ibsen's play found Nora living in 1918, in 1968, and 2018. It showed that home is not always a place of safety and fulfilment, and that leaving home brings other kinds of hardships in an unequal world. The 2020 pandemic revealed the depth of social and economic inequalities – not everyone could stay at home, and not everyone had a home to stay in. The other tragic event in 2020, the death of George Floyd May 25 at the hands of the Minnesota police, re-energised the Black Lives Matter Movement, leading to protests and civil unrest across the world. #BlackLivesMatter amplified that racial injustice exists everywhere, including on our streets and in our homes.

The Young Vic's ambitious and innovative Taking Part programme during the 2020 pandemic showed that theatres were not closed, but open for people to participate in new forms of creative and inclusive practices. There is no doubt that 2020 changed theatre, making Taking Part programmes more visible, more urgent, and more centrally placed within theatres' ecosystem. This report reflects on what has been learnt from 2020, the ways in which participants adapted to new circumstances, how artforms changed, and the role technology has played. At heart, it is testament to why theatre matters, where it takes place, whose voices are heard, and how artists are valued.

This executive summary captures some of the key findings.

1. The Young Vic as a Neighbourhood theatre: The Taking Part Programme during the pandemic showed the strength of the Young Vic's commitment its neighbourhood. Its established partnerships with people and organisations in Southwark and Lambeth – two of the most deprived boroughs in London – enabled the Taking Part programme to be flexible, open and responsive to changes brought by the lockdown.
2. The Young Vic as an artistically innovative theatre: The Taking Part programme during the pandemic developed new forms of creative engagement, integrating film, live digital performance, and online workshops into their work with young people and local participants. The creative vision that already existed at the Young Vic meant that the theatre was fertile ground for changing art forms, which benefitted the Taking

Part programme as it moved from rehearsal rooms to home-spaces. Artists felt encouraged to experiment and embrace new artistic forms and ways of working.

3. The Taking Part Programme benefitted from inclusive, creative and compassionate leadership. New challenges were seen as an opportunity to extend their work and focus on the positive. Decision-making processes were open, inclusive, and based on an ethic of care. This encouraged everyone to work together as a shared endeavour, based on goodwill and with a spirit of collaboration.
4. Agile programme based on shared values: The Taking Part Programme was agile and resilient during the pandemic. The team found ways to adapt their programme in ways that enabled participants to continue to work together, based on their shared values and a clear sense of purpose.
5. Benefits to Participants: Participating in the Taking Part programme during the pandemic benefitted everyone involved. Producers, freelance artists, community artists, young people and the Young Vic staff reported that the programme had given them a sense of purpose and value at a difficult time. The opportunity to come together, to learn new skills, and to have space and time to work creatively increased resilience and feelings of wellbeing and decreased loneliness for everyone involved.
6. Feeling Free and Heard: Participants reported that the Taking Part programme enabled them to feel liberated from the constraints of lockdown and amplified voices that might otherwise have been unheard in the pandemic. Theatre-making provided a shape for creative expressions, but the positivity generated extended to other aspects of life, with participants reporting using newfound skills and confidence in other creative, educational, and personal contexts.
7. Home working: there were challenges of working at home for everyone involved, and the effects of digital poverty were evident. The Taking Part team responded with sensitivity, but there is a need for longer-term solutions to this form of inequality.
8. Safeguarding: The Young Vic responded to new demands for online safeguarding by adapting their practice and creating new safeguarding guidelines for working digitally. Reflecting the variety of digital formats utilised by Taking Part, they include a code of conduct for live video chats, Zoom, and submitting videos.
9. The Young Vic's Taking Part programme demonstrates the theatre's deep commitment to social justice, and illustrates how its strong connections to the Black Lives Matter Movement can be felt and experienced both locally in its community and on the stage.
10. The Taking Part Programme during the pandemic was inspirational, and received increased public visibility during 2020. The Young Vic's programme made and

documented history, and its significance as a major part of theatre sector and the nation's theatre culture should not be forgotten when performances can begin again.

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Introduction

At the start of 2020, learning, participation, and neighbourhood work at the Young Vic was beginning a new chapter. With Shereen Jasmin Phillips at the helm as Director, Taking Part

was commissioning new projects, exploring important themes, and extending its already significant local reach via a number of community partnerships. The events of March 2020, with the closure of theatres on 16th March followed a week later by a national lockdown, were a moment of crisis for live arts venues across the country. Suddenly organisations whose purpose was to facilitate communal experiences were having to develop online or recorded work. The move to online working raised issues about new forms of creative participation, and called for great inventiveness from artists and Taking Part staff, as well as participants. Online participation revealed inequalities, particularly in relation to digital inclusion and complex relationships to working at home. What also emerged, though, was the potential of working online to connect people and foster resilience at a time when lockdown measures were causing increasing loneliness and isolation. In the online space that emerged, it became clear that activities could help people feel connected with their neighbours and neighbourhood. With the Young Vic's leadership, people in its neighbourhood were nurtured and supported as a community through this time of crisis. This report explores the work that was undertaken by the Young Vic's Taking Part programme in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020.

Taking Part produces work across three strands: Learning, Participation, and Neighbourhood Theatre. The Learning programme is one of the three strands of the Young Vic's Taking Part programme. It focuses on providing support to schools, colleges, and further education providers. The Young Vic provides varied opportunities that include bespoke workshops in classrooms that support the curriculum, teacher training, productions, work experience and placements. Through the Young Vic's collaboration with local schools and colleges in Lambeth and Southwark, students' experience of theatre become enhanced, and provides them with the opportunity of having direct access to the artists who work with them. The learning strand provides young people with insight into the creative process, working in a professional environment and encourages continued participation outside of school to develop them into emerging theatre-makers.

- *Under Mr Barbie Duvet* was a digital scrapbook created in response to the play *Nora*, which was being staged at the Young Vic when Covid-19 restrictions forced it to close early. The digital scrapbook was created with a group of young women from the Baytree Centre in Brixton who looked at the theme of feminism. The aim of *Under My Barbie Duvet* was to establish what modern-day feminism looked like to young people. Although the project was initially intended to be a short film, the piece went through several different phases which eventually resulted in a digital scrapbook.
- The Home 20 project was created based on the notion of what home means to us and the things, people, senses and feelings that signify home to different people. There had previously been a theatre installation in 2019 at the Young Vic about home and the decision was taken to revisit the topic with the same participants in 2020 to determine if their views or perspectives on the topic had been any different to the year before, particularly in light of the pandemic.

The Participation programme works with young people aged 14-25 who live in the boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark. The following activities are/were run under this strand:

- *Hear Us*: A digital zine commissioned to explore racial injustice in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. The project engaged young people with the significance of the Black Livers Matter movement and the felling of the Edward Colston's statue in Bristol; using poetry, animation, and film to examine history and identity.
- Young Associates Scheme: an eight-month placement opportunity in the Department for two young people from Southwark.
- Young Mentor Programme: an opportunity for eight young people to participate in a paid training programme to become mentors to older mentees from a range of different industries.
- Young Board & Leadership: a year-long opportunity allowing participants to create a collective that will inform what the Young Vic does and help shape how the Young Vic serves other young people in its local community.
- Backstage Niche: a series of sessions for Lambeth and Southwark residents aged 14-18 years olds which introduces participants to careers in backstage roles in theatre.

The Neighbourhood programme works with residents of the boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark who are aged 25 or above. In 2020 the following projects were run under this strand:

- Neighbourhood Voices: a year-long playwrighting programme resulting in a professional performance, which was originally planned to take place in-person at the Young Vic but, with a national lockdown imposed in January 2021, ultimately took place over Zoom/YouTube.
- Write from Home: a remote playwrighting course comprising four digital exercise packs and two online workshops. The idea for the course was conceived early in lockdown and provided applicants who had not been accepted onto the Neighbourhood Voices programme the opportunity to develop their playwrighting skills during lockdown.
- Neighbourhood Play: a series of movement workshops for people aged 55 and above in Lambeth and Southwark. Usually offered as in-person workshops that respond to productions in the Young Vic's main season, Neighbourhood Play moved to delivery via Zoom and took inspiration from the theme of Home, History and Heritage.
- *TWENTY TWENTY*: a year-long project partnered with community organisations Blackfriars Settlement, Thames Reach, and Certitude. The project began life as three plays, written by professional playwrights following workshops with participants. These plays were due to be staged at the Young Vic, but ongoing Covid restrictions made an in-person performance impossible. Working with Tea Films, the original creatives commissioned to work on the project turned the three plays into three films.

Research Context and Methodology

This report was compiled as early findings about the effects of the pandemic on young people, the creative sector and communities was beginning to emerge. Related research demonstrates how lockdown led to poor mental health and increased loneliness, and rising levels of child and pensioner poverty.ⁱ

This evaluation contributes to this context. Data for our analysis was gathered through surveys, focus groups and interviews, which engaged with staff and participants. We invited relevant artists and participants to speak with us and conducted a total of thirteen focus group or interview discussions with those who chose to contribute. All Taking Part participants were invited to complete an anonymous survey as part of our evaluation activities.ⁱⁱ We also reviewed existing evaluation responses, attended sessions and events run by Taking Part and watched the live and recorded creative outputs of the projects under consideration in this report. Doing so has helped us build up a picture of the exciting work undertaken at the Young Vic in the midst of a pandemic. The research was carried out after the Taking Part programmes had concluded, however, and there was inevitably an element of self-selectivity about who was available and/ or willing to contribute.

Online Facilitation and Digital Media

In March 2020 Taking Part's existing projects had to quickly pivot from in-person to online delivery. All workshops, such as sessions for the Neighbourhood Voices and Neighbourhood Play programmes, were conducted over Zoom. *Under My Barbie Duvet*, a play that was due to be performed shortly after lockdown was announced, was initially reconceived as a film and ultimately became a digital scrapbook. As lockdown lengthened and it became clear that Covid-19 restrictions were likely to be in place for the foreseeable future, further projects had to adapt and performances planned for the theatre were reimaged and made in different forms. In the case of *TWENTY TWENTY*, three short plays became three short films; for Neighbourhood Voices, what should have been an in-person final performance became a live-streamed performance over Zoom/YouTube; and *Home 20* became an online exhibition. The Taking Part programme further embraced digital performance mediums and commissioned a digital zine for the *Hear Us* project in the summer of 2020 and continues to review and expand its offer of projects, programmes, and initiatives even while the theatre building itself is closed.

The Practical Implications of Digital Media

The move to online participation required the majority of artists to learn new skills, either as online facilitators, as creatives on recorded rather than live performance, or in some cases, both. In our conversations with artists it became clear that online facilitation presents unique challenges. Director of digital zine *Hear Us*, Jo Tyabji, reflected on the challenges of online workshops: taking part in sessions on Zoom requires a lot of “heavy concentration” from participants in the early stages of a project or activity, before participants are familiar with the form. Artists had to be creative in adapting warmup games to the medium, to find innovative ways to facilitate group formation, and to break up activities to avoid Zoom-fatigue. As artists became more confident with the technology and the technology itself developed, new possibilities from the format emerged. Participants spoke particularly highly of the creative use of breakout rooms, both for making devising tasks more efficient, as well as for aiding group-formation and enabling friendships to blossom. As Neighbourhood Play participant Pixie reflected: “when you're [all] on one screen you have to wait your turn [...]

you get one-fifteenth of the time, whereas if you're in a breakout room, you get a third of the time to talk and to contribute and be part of it.

Using breakout rooms required thought from facilitators in respect to safeguarding. As with in-person sessions, artists never work one-to-one with a young or vulnerable person. However, whereas in-person it is possible for one artist to work with a participant at one end of a room while their co-facilitator works with other participants at the other, with breakout rooms there is not the same possibility for synchronous activity in the same "space". Jo Tyabji observed that this put a unique time pressure on rehearsals, as two facilitators worked on the same activity at all times. Furthermore, with no opportunity for one-to-one work, this facilitation format required participants to perform in front of a group from an early stage, which was daunting for some. However, allowing participants to choose how they engaged with the "space", such as whether or not to have their camera on, helped to assuage their nerves and allowed them to build up confidence in the online format.

Another challenge of the online environment related to group formation. Participants in pre-existing programmes, such as Neighbourhood Play, reflected that the move online was made easier by the fact they already knew each other. New initiatives, however, needed to invest a significant amount of time in group formation. Jo Tyabji reflected that for *Hear Us* planning and time management were key, so that warm-ups and other ensemble activities could be afforded the additional time required for online group formation. Participants in *Hear Us* reported that they had made new friends and encountered new perspectives on the project, which suggests that this investment in group formation activities paid off.

The Write from Home programme faced a particular challenge in creating intimacy and forming a group, as the programme included just two synchronous sessions alongside four digital exercise packs. With only limited time, group formation activities were not a priority and some participants reported feeling impatient and frustrated in the context of a large group. One participant reflected:

"I struggle to feel comfortable sharing to large groups of strangers. There were lots of people taking part and it felt quite isolating not being able to get to know them on a personal level." (Anonymous survey respondent, Write from Home)

While warm-ups and activities in break-out rooms can be time consuming, it would be worth considering increasing the number of sessions or the session duration in order to assist with group formation. This, of course, has logistical and budgetary implications, but reflects the particular challenges of online facilitation.

It is not for group formation alone that more time would be beneficial. A recurring issue that arose in conversations with both artists and participants was how working remotely via Zoom required more time in almost all cases. Activities take longer to set up in an online context and conversations between artists that, in-person, could happen while participants are working on another activity or during a break are no longer possible. A number of artists felt that, were projects to run again, it would be helpful if they could be extended slightly in order to account for the online format.

Several artists remarked on the difference between planning and creating a digital project, as opposed to a theatre project. They found they had to draw on new skills to bring their ideas to life in a new medium. This challenge was particularly marked for the creatives involved in the *TWENTY TWENTY* project, who went from working on plays to films. In the project's evaluation session the artists spoke of the challenges of adapting to a medium with which they are not familiar and the conventions of scheduling, shooting and editing that they had to learn quickly on the job. Added to these challenges was the additional Covid safety protocol, which was required on film sets at the time, meaning that it was a steep learning curve for the artists working on the project.

With work moving online it was necessary to adapt existing safeguarding policy to ensure it addressed the specific context of online practice. The Young Vic developed a code of conduct for live video chats, Zoom, and submitting videos, which is available on their website.ⁱⁱⁱ The code of conduct provides guidance to participants about how they should behave online, for example "Wear appropriate clothing, even on parts of you that you think won't be seen" and "Do not record or take photos of anything without the others consent." It also recognises that the online environment was likely to be unfamiliar to many participants and outlines particular practicalities such as "You may be held in a virtual waiting room before the session starts – please wait and you will be allowed into the session when the host is ready" and advises participants to "Keep your microphone on mute and unmute when you need to speak – this limits background noise and helps everyone to hear better."

With participants often joining from shared domestic spaces they are advised to use headphones. They are also advised to make sure that the people they are living with know that they are participating in an online session, but that they should not be included in the chat or call. For filming projects, participants are advised to avoid filming anything that might reveal their home address, school, or anywhere they go regularly. The guidance also encourages communication – "Remember that it's easy to misinterpret things online – please ask directly if something is not clear." – and provides direct contact details for both Shereen and Lorna, should participants have any questions or concerns.

Taking Part staff and workshop facilitators ensured that all sessions were password-protected and obtained consent from participants when recording sessions. Two staff members were present at all times. The final projects were shared only via official Young Vic accounts and participants were sent a final edit before content was made publicly available. These steps are important aspects in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of participants in Taking Part projects and represent an important contribution to the development of online safeguarding practice in the sector.

The Creative Implications of working Digitally

As well as practical implications, the move to digital workshops and performances had creative implications. One participant on the *Home 20* project spoke of her difficulty in getting used to the online format, as someone who is particularly interested in movement and physicality she found the online space, combined with everyday life commitments challenging. Similarly, some participants on the Neighbourhood Play programme, which focusses specifically on movement, spoke of the challenge of "being in a fixed environment without the social interaction and body language, so much a part of movement" (Survey

Respondent). However, participants also spoke highly of the inventiveness of artists in making creative activities possible online: “It was great to be able to continue with this despite lockdown. Corinne is a brilliant facilitator and it the sessions were very enjoyable. I particularly valued opportunities to move and exercise at home” (Neighbourhood Play Survey Respondent).

While most of TP’s projects had to pivot to a digital format, the *Hear Us* project was originally commissioned as a digital zine that incorporated poetry, animation, and performance. Participants spoke highly of the creative possibilities the format opened up for them. Participant India reflected: “It was a whole range of things, and that’s what I think’s really good. It wasn’t just focussing on one area, it was just creation in so many different ways and I really liked that.” *Hear Us* participants also valued the opportunity to steer the creative output, as Lucy reflected: “I felt like, me as a performer, I was able to be more creative because it was mostly our ideas that was coming forward. We literally made the play [...] so in terms of learning new skills, I think I definitely took a lot from the Young Vic...”. As well as unlocking the participants’ existing creativity through games, activities, and reflections, participants also had the opportunity to undertake a workshop on animation techniques with project animator, Edalia Day. Thus, participants were able not only to explore new creative avenues, but also to gain new skills in the process.

Just as *Hear Us* was designed to weave together different art forms, including animation and film, to create an original performance genre, so the projects that pivoted from an in-person performance to filmed pieces also pushed the boundaries of existing creative media. As one of the artists involved in *TWENTY TWENTY* reflected, the project provided the opportunity to “creatively interrogate the space between film and live theatre”. Likewise, the artists involved with *Home 20* found that they were exploring questions of genre and media via their work, as Director/Curator Taio Lawson reflected:

“I get really bored with the limitations of making theatre sometimes and that’s what is so cool about this project. The hope for me, is that I can do some more courses to build on it. I think I see a pathway into asking what the future of storytelling is or what its experience could be.” The resulting project offered a unique model for audience-engagement, as Taio reflected: “You find a way to push it into something that is more in the hands and the minds and control of our audiences, which can be quite fun and opens us up to being increasingly creative in the way we make theatre.”

Implications for Participants

For participants, the move online presented both challenges and opportunities. Adapting to working remotely via Zoom presents numerous challenges for projects involving performance, movement, and acting, yet everyone we spoke to – producers, artists, and participants – gave us a strong sense of their commitment to making this new format work. Within this model, there was a real sense of collaboration and as Director of TP Shereen Jasmin Phillips stated artists, producers, and participants were all learning together. This sentiment was echoed by Neighbourhood Play participant Pixie, who suggested that it had:

“What’s been interesting is watching how we’ve learned and Corinne and the Young Vic have learned to use the medium, to use Zoom, to use digital theatre. It’s been

interesting, I think we've helped contribute and they've helped contribute it's been a collaboration of: this is the situation we're in, these are the problems, how do we solve the problems? This works and this doesn't work."

The digital literacy skills participants gained on Taking Part projects contributed positively to other aspects of participants' lives. Respondents reported utilising their newly acquired technical competencies in other creative, educational, and personal contexts. For example, learning to use Zoom in Neighbourhood Play workshops enabled participants to engage with other cultural opportunities, as participant Beatrice reflected:

"They have taught us to communicate via Zoom, which I had no idea [about] – it's not my generation at all, so I've learned that. And I could see that now it's the way it might be going on. Many theatres now do things online and so on. And I think it's just like we're offered this opportunity to catch the train at the right time...so it's a great opportunity we've been offered to know what's coming next and to be part of the journey."

Participants' newfound digital literacy skills benefitted their wider communities, as they applied these competencies in other contexts. Neighbourhood Play participant Pixie reflected:

"I do other online Zoom acting stuff and I've taken things that we've learned at Neighbourhood Play and said 'oh when I do this thing at the Young Vic, we do this'. And it's saved a little bit of time. So it's part of a sharing, not just amongst ourselves, but also disseminating information to other groups and other places."

It wasn't only older participants that benefitted from the skills in online technologies that they developed as a result of the project. One of the *Hear Us* participants reflected that:

"It gave me an insight of what you actually have to do with digital theatre, so when actually I had to do that for one of my courses, I already...knew what to do straight away. So, it really helped me, because I was able to explain it to my teacher – she didn't have a clue how to work via Zoom or anything, so I was able to take a leadership role."

From our conversations with participants we were struck by the ripple effects of the skills and experience participants gained from being involved with a TP project. TP's commitment to offering participants a supportive and collaborative experience of new technology not only enabled participants to continue to work on their projects, but also boosted their confidence with working online and equipped them with skills that they could apply in other contexts, including educational, community, and social activities.

There were very real concerns about the lack of access to computers and online access and its impact on participation. This regularly emerged as a theme in our conversations with artists. One of the artists from *Under My Barbie Duvet* reflected that the experience of working on the project increased her awareness of the access issues associated with technology. As a result, she went on to engage with a charity that increases accessibility by distributing computers and laptops to the community. In addition to having the necessary

tech – a phone, laptop, or tablet - access to reliable, affordable broadband also impacted on the delivery of activities. One of the most commonly reported challenges of working online was to do with unreliable connections and issues with devices. Another related aspect to working from home was having a quiet, private space from which to join sessions. One *Home 20* participant reflected that the challenges associated with concentrating while working at home proved hard to overcome.

While working online may present accessibility issues for some theatre participants producers need to consider, that working online also presents opportunities in relation to reaching a much wider audience. As Dan, Sound Designer on *Home 20* reflected, working online is:

“really the way to get true accessibility across to everything. It’s not London-centric, you don’t have to be fully abled to go and anyone from any class can access it. I think that’s something people should remember from this pandemic in the theatre community. This is really accessible, it should still be there.”

For participants who are also carers, working online was beneficial: “I was also able to take part around other caring responsibilities which may have made in-person engagement hard” (Anonymous survey respondent, Write from Home). Furthermore, participants with physical and mental health conditions reported that being able to participate from home meant that they missed fewer sessions than they would have if they had been attending in person, “because all I had to do was switch a camera on.”

Zoom was not the only digital format that had some positive implications for accessibility; artists also reflected on some of the advantages of working in the medium of film. In the *TWENTY TWENTY* feedback session, artists observed that film can often be a closed-off medium and so giving community access to film-making was a particularly positive step. Furthermore, as a recorded medium, it was possible to make adaptations throughout the process and feed performers lines where necessary. A significant advantage is that there was therefore less pressure on participants to learn their lines or create a character arc; as one artist reflected “they only have to get it right once”.

Implications for Artistic Practice & Facilitation

Artists observed that a project within a digital medium was retained or recorded, whereas a live performance in a theatre space may be limited to just one or two performances.

One artist cited the difference between planning and creating in the theatre as being a very different process and having to draw on new skills to bring their ideas to life. Creatively, nothing was set in stone as the ongoing change signalled a live creative process. Discovering the limitlessness of the digital world, also meant that as artists and creatives new things were uncovered or discovered every day:

“We discovered that other than you are not in real life with this thing. The internet, the digital version of making art is totally limitless. You don’t even need to play by gravity. There is no end to what you can do... Creatively, I think what we could work on this project forever” (Rosanna, Designer)

Artists were intrigued by the idea that a production which had been running in the West End could still be seen through digital theatre, some 20 years later.

The longevity of the output had implications for some of the *TWENTY TWENTY* artists when they reflected on the relationship between process and product in the context of a community film. Some artists reported feeling a heightened sense of awareness of the aesthetic value of the artistic product, given they were creating something that would have an afterlife of several years. The longevity of the film was something that was also remarked upon by a number of participants. Some *TWENTY TWENTY* performers reported feeling nervous about working in a film format, as opposed to the ephemeral medium of live-performance:

“when they said it was going to be a film I dreaded it, I absolutely dreaded it. I was like ‘I can’t be on camera, I don’t want to be on camera’. It’s so much different than theatre because with theatre you just do it and you’re off stage. The film and the idea that it was going to be lying around for a couple of years absolutely terrified me... And actually it turned out that filming was *brilliant*. It was really, really good. I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed the whole process of it. And the team were just so committed. A lot of my anxieties just disappeared.” (Jill, *TWENTY TWENTY* participant)

In the feedback session for artists involved in *TWENTY TWENTY* several people reflected on the unique demands involved in facilitating a film, as opposed to a play. A particular issue was camera fright, which was very powerful in some cases. All the participants in the project that we spoke to were full of praise for the sensitivity and support shown by the artist facilitators. For example, Richard, who was involved in the film *Even At Our Age* spoke of his nervousness at having no audience to provide feedback on his performance and how much it meant to him that the cameraman on the project gave him a positive response: “a thumbs up from the cameraman was just brilliant. If I was allowed to, I would have hugged him!” This supportive gesture from the film crew is an example of the new facilitation skills that artists developed working in this format. In the evaluation session for the project, artists reflected on how the project had prompted them to re-evaluate the role of the facilitator.

Working on *TWENTY TWENTY* required artists to adapt, as creatives who were originally commissioned to make a play suddenly found themselves working on a film. At the evaluation session we gained vivid insights into the creativity, flexibility and resilience of the creatives who created these projects. While there were undoubtedly challenges of working in a completely new medium, many artists reported feeling excited by the opportunity to learn a new form in a safe and supportive environment, where they were allowed to make mistakes and learn on the job. Furthermore, moving to a film context prompted new collaborative relationships, as the existing creatives from the theatre project worked with Tea Films to realise the project as a film.

In the *Home 20* project, the artists’ creative journey and experience allowed them to engage with a new digital theatre language which could be incorporated into their discipline/craft, opening them up to what is possible and building on the new skills learnt. This was reflected in the experiences of Dan, Sound Designer on *Home20*: “I discovered so much with sound; it

was mind boggling. I discovered what Java script is and it...helps. Now I'm doing lessons in Java script to learnt it." He reflected that the new skills he developed also created a pathway for what storytelling could be: "It's engaged me with a new language, and I want to learn it and bring that into my discipline. It's opened my eyes to what is possible." (Dan, Sound Designer). Digital theatre also brought about an awareness of no longer having to answer to a budget in terms of physical space for a production.

Resilience and Self-Expression in a Global Pandemic

Our analysis of resilience was informed by current NHS guidance on wellbeing. In our conversations with artists and participants and our observation of practice we considered how activities might help participants to:

- build a sense of belonging and self-worth
- boost self-confidence
- raise self esteem
- build a sense of purpose
- connect with others^{iv}

In a survey of Neighbourhood Play participants, we asked how being a member of the programme had impacted on specific aspects of participants' day-to-day lives. The results suggest that for a significant majority of participants, being part of Neighbourhood Play has brought numerous benefits. For example, it is remarkable that in a year defined by lockdown, all respondents felt that participating in Neighbourhood Play had "helped me feel part of my community". This score suggests that Neighbourhood Play played an integral role in keeping people connected with their communities during lockdown, something that will be explored further in the next section. Questions relating to resilience, self-esteem and purpose all received more than 80% positive responses (see Figure 1), suggesting that the programme had multiple well-being benefits for participants.

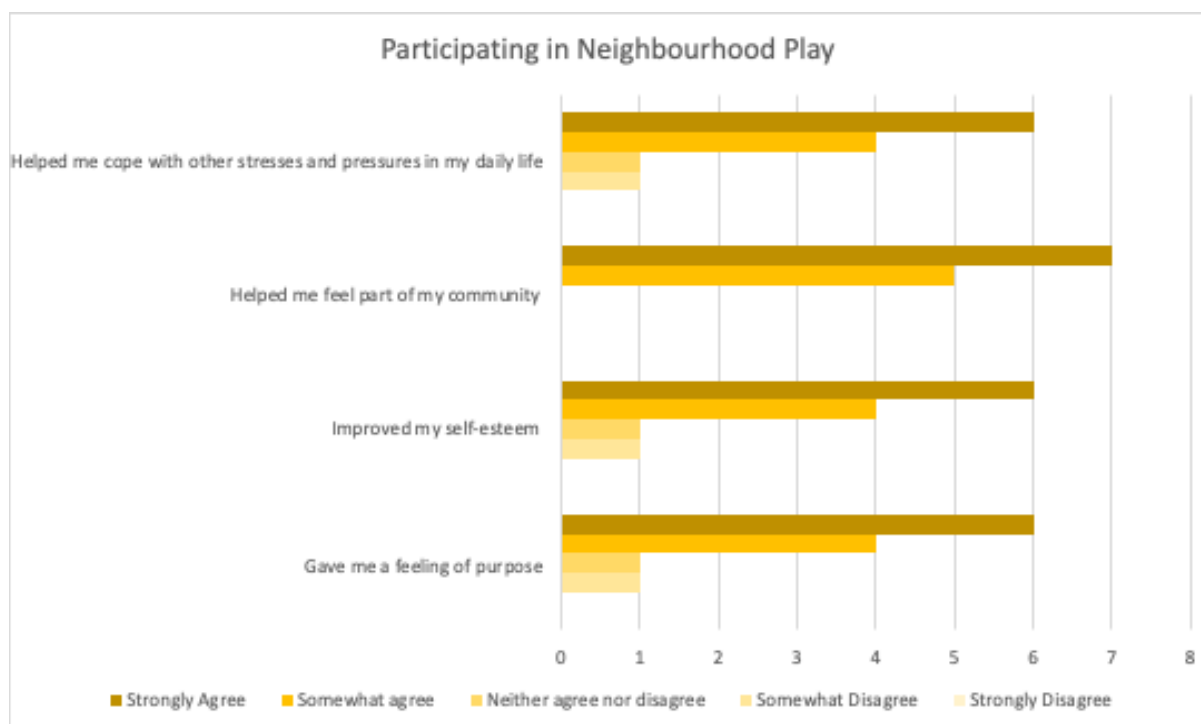


Figure 1 Survey of Neighbourhood Play participants: "Participating in Neighbourhood Play..."

Figure 2 is a visualisation of answers to questions related to participants' feelings having completed the course. It is particularly striking that *all* respondents reported having come away feeling that they had achieved something and that they had *all* made new friends. More than 80% of respondents also felt that as a result of participating in the programme they had encountered new perspectives, grown in confidence, and developed new skills.

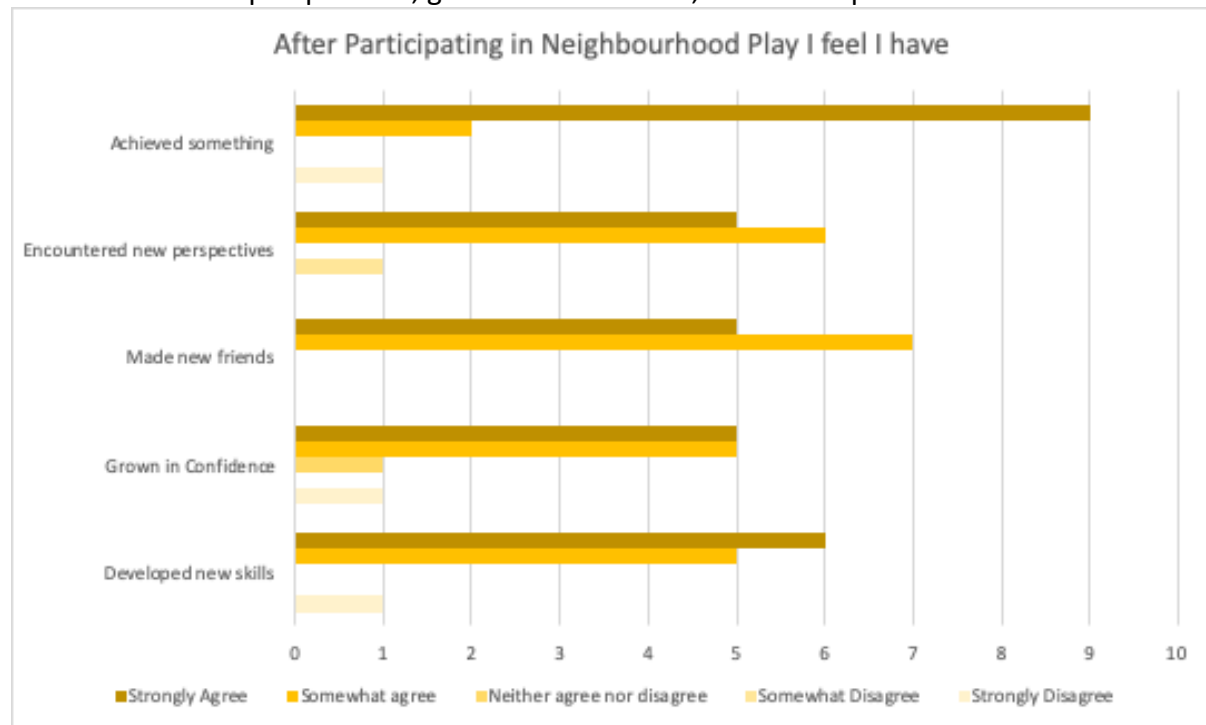


Figure 2 Survey of Neighbourhood Play participants: "After participating in Neighbourhood Play I feel I have..."

These figures suggest that participating in Neighbourhood Play helped to support participants' wellbeing. Existing feedback received by the Young Vic had frequently referenced the benefits of participation to mental health. For example, in responses to mid-point evaluation for the *TWENTY TWENTY*, a number of respondents reflected directly on the important role the project played in supporting their well-being:

- "I know how much this type of interaction with people can improve my mood, and help me live my life in the best way I can, and stay on top of things, both physically and mentally." (Anonymous survey respondent)
- "The confidence that I can help to create some interesting drama, enjoy being part of a group, and feel emotionally well, from having participated." (Anonymous survey respondent)

The importance of being part of a collaborative community in lockdown, when everyone experienced isolation was a theme in many of our conversations. Neighbourhood Play participant, Beatrice reflected how taking part in the programme "allow[ed] me personally to breach the loneliness and sometimes the sadness we are sometimes facing, not only living as single persons like I do, but also as an expat in a foreign culture." A similar sentiment was articulated by an anonymous *TWENTY TWENTY* participant who reflected:

“This especially during this pandemic has been so helpful being able to connect stops me from feeling isolated. We have done so many fun items together that they have left a positive impression on me. I really have enjoyed the 2020 project so much it has been good for my mental and physical health”. (Anonymous survey respondent)



Figure 3 Describe how participating in Neighbourhood Play make you feel in three words

It is important that the outcomes relating to resilience and wellbeing should be understood against the backdrop of a uniquely challenging year. Many participants reported that their involvement in TP’s activities were the highlight of their week. For example, in feedback from the *TWENTY TWENTY* participants and partners, the context of Covid featured in many comments:

- “Has kept me busy in this horrible time” (Anonymous survey respondent)
- “During these covid-19 times it has been a ray of light to be taking part in the project...” (Anonymous survey respondent)
- “it has helped me to keep calm in this Pandemic, and feel confident that life continues.” (Anonymous survey respondent)
- “With so much negative things going on in the world this year it has been a joy and a ray of sunshine for me” (Anonymous survey respondent)

Participants on all projects reported that taking part had boosted their self-confidence, but *TWENTY TWENTY* in particular seems to have had a remarkable impact on participants’ confidence, as this was a recurring theme in the feedback we analysed, both from participants – “gave me lots of confidence” – and partner organisations – “Incredible growth of confidence in participants”.

It is important to consider that it was not participants alone whose resilience and wellbeing was helped by TP’s activities, artists also reported feeling an increased sense of belonging and purpose as a result of their work with TP. For example, in the *TWENTY TWENTY* feedback session, one artist reflected that “having an opportunity to give” was immensely valuable in

the context of Covid-19, lockdowns, and social isolation. Furthermore, witnessing participants' growth as a result of the process appeared to have a profound effect on artists. One person reflected that, when it came to filming *TWENTY TWENTY*, in some cases the increased confidence of participants led them to ask "who is this person?!" They reflected that sending this new person out into the world is a "beautiful thing".

Listening and Being Heard

The context of the pandemic had a unique impact on young people, who experienced disruption to their education and uncertainty about their future. The experience of being heard is a major factor in overcoming loneliness, suggesting that the programmes' culture of listening was a significant factor in ameliorating feelings of loneliness and isolation.

The artists involved in the *Home 20* project reflected that they used the significance of lockdown as a way into their collaboration with participants:

"The restrictions of the world at the moment forced us online, but also the whole thing started with all of us realising that these young people, because of their age and the way that their education has been knocked so heavily, meant that they were really in quite a vulnerable position. So we just really wanted to have a chat with them, that was how it all started." Taio (Director/Curator)

The artists created an atmosphere where participants were encouraged to be themselves and to share their ideas, emphasising participants' integral role in the process and that their contribution and time were valued. We gained a strong sense of the process being beneficial for the young participants, as it allowed them to be able to speak freely about how the topics/theme for *Home 20* related to their lives. Furthermore, participants reflected that they had not only been heard, but were listened to.

A sense of the quality of the creative process was also present in our conversations with *Hear Us* participants. As Lucy stated:

"It was nice to get something that was happening in the world and make it into art. And even though it was a negative situation we was able to educate people. So I think it was really effective, the way we worked together and were able to put a play- our monologues were mostly based around problems and how we feel as youths and what we can do to make things better."

Another participant wrote in a survey response that they had experienced a kind of political awakening, stating that working on the project had made them aware:

"That there is a lot of things we still don't know of. There is so much history in this world that we do not know or understand. I have also learnt that in order for change to happen people need to sit down and realise they need to go out there and find the truth themselves. People always take things face value." (Anonymous survey respondent)

In the process of making the digital zine, participants discovered creative skills that they were not aware they had: “I was really surprised at myself and what I write down [in the first creative exercise]. I couldn’t believe I was me. That moment was freeing and is seared in my mind” (Anonymous survey respondent, *Hear Us*).

Participants described how the Taking Part programme enabled them to see themselves in different ways. Thelma, a participant in Neighbourhood Play, felt that the project had taught her that “basically nothing’s impossible!” and went on to reflect:

“I’ll tell you what it’s helped me to do: when I’m with my grandkids it helps me to be more creative with them when they’re doing silly things. I can just say ‘it’s just like when we’re at a Neighbourhood thing, just be creative, it doesn’t matter – just be silly!’ [...] And I think it has helped with the grandkids because you think ‘don’t put limits on yourself’.”

Exploring Identity and Building Communities

“Look at the Young Vic website and it says that the theatre is currently closed. But the *TWENTY TWENTY* films are a reminder that’s not quite true. During the pandemic many theatres, including the Young Vic, have been continuing to work with and within their communities. *TWENTY TWENTY* demonstrates that participatory work is just as deserving of its patch of digital sunlight as all the starry Uncle Vanyas or big-name musicals.”

Lyn Gardner

“When the Young Vic had to close its doors in March 2020 its relationship with the community it serves inevitably had to change, as it was no longer able to be a physical hub for local people. Taking Part staff displayed a remarkable and commendable commitment to remaining an integral part of the community and in finding new ways to serve people in their neighbourhood and facilitate community-building.

The partnerships forged as part of the *TWENTY TWENTY* project became all the more significant in the context of lockdown, with Young Vic staff helping to partner organisations deliver food to vulnerable people living locally. As this representative of a partner organisation emphasises it was a richly rewarding collaboration:

“The entire experience has been really unique for our staff and participants. It has brought a really diverse group of people together from across the community and allowed them to share, develop and express themselves collectively. It was really great to offer such a project as a part of our programme as it is unlike anything else that we do or have done before. It has been a really challenging year for everyone and people we support have been at a high risk of becoming isolated. *TWENTY TWENTY* has allowed people to stay connected and really given them something to look forward to.”

However, it was not simply the case that the Young Vic engaged with existing communities, it also forged new ones. As one artist involved in *TWENTY TWENTY* reflected in the evaluation session “you lot were the last people I saw in real life who aren’t my family”. The sense of a shared adventure and shared challenges forged a unique relationship between artists and

participants, leading one artist to reflect “*TWENTY TWENTY* was a community in itself”, as “we were all going through this thing together”.



Figure 4 A Word Cloud of the one-word and one-sentence activity summary from the *TWENTY TWENTY* artist evaluation session

Staff involved in the Taking Part programme made significant efforts to bridge the asynchronous realm of online work by creating live sharing events for participants in their programmes. We attended the live streaming of the Neighbourhood Voices performances, which were shared via YouTube. Utilising YouTube’s chat function during the livestreaming enabled viewers to interact and respond to the performances in real time. Attendees joked that they were sitting “in the stalls”, used emojis to respond to and applaud performances, and commented “I actually feel part of an audience - it's amazing!”. The level of engagement in the chat contributed to a profound sense of occasion and is an example of some of the innovative digital methods used to forge community by the TP team.

Another example of online community-building is the *TWENTY TWENTY* watch party, which was held over Zoom, and to which all artists and participants were invited. In advance of the event, project participants had been sent a “watch party pack” which included food/drink to go with each performance – biscuits for *Tapestry*, tea for *Even at Our Age*, and plantain chips for *Home(body)* – as well as a *TWENTY TWENTY* keyring, popcorn, a letter, and a certificate of participation, all of which were sent in a gold envelope. These shared objects helped to ground the event in the physical, as well as the digital realm, and forged a connection with viewers across the miles. By using Zoom, participants were able to see and interact with each other. For us as observers, it was powerful to see the gallery of viewers alongside the films being streamed and to witness first-hand their pride at the finished films. The watch party enabled the communities formed as a result of the practice to come together to share the final product and it was striking to note how, if a participant expressed nervousness or doubts about their performance, the rest of the community would immediately leap in and assuage their fear. Had participants been left to watch the films in their own time this environment

of positive reception and support would have been lost. Small details – such as the choice of “I Believe in Miracles” as the song playing when the Zoom room was opened – are evidence of the careful thought that had gone into the event, while Shereen’s assertion that the *TWENTY TWENTY* teams were “first on our guest list” for when the theatre reopens, served powerfully to locate the digital event within the physical space of the Young Vic.

The conclusion of any creative experience can be challenging for participants, for whom the experience may have been intense, rewarding and stimulating. The context of lockdown and social distancing appeared in some cases to intensify experiences of post-participation withdrawal. One participant on the Neighbourhood Voices programme reflected:

“Post Programme support is very important. I went from an extreme high to extreme low, I lost the structure and discipline I had developed during the course. So I look forward to future meetings with alumni of the programme.” (Anonymous survey respondent, Neighbourhood Voices)

Offering participants the chance to reconnect after their collaborations or signposting other creative opportunities could help to support participants once a project or programme has concluded.

Exploring Identity

A closely related aspect to community is identity including personal and professional experience, came up regularly in our conversations. Participants in Neighbourhood Play, spoke of the programme’s significance from the perspective of age:

“I thought it might be a box-ticking exercise: ‘get the oldies in and give them a nice cup of tea. And we’ll play a couple of games and then we’ll send them home again.’ And it isn’t like that at all. It’s an incredibly dynamic group of people who come together. And we have arguments, we have disagreements about how we’re gonna do things and at the end of it we all come out with a piece of work that’s a phenomenal achievement ...So what it gives me is confidence about how getting older isn’t gonna be as bad as part of my brain thinks it’s gonna be.” Pixie, Neighbourhood Play participant

An anonymous survey respondent from the same programme also reflected that: “It is really good to have something so positive for seniors, to make us feel ‘youthful’ but not in a ‘mutton dressed up as lamb’ way but rather with our age not being a barrier.” For these participants, being involved in Neighbourhood Play was an opportunity to redefine what being 55+ means to them, with all the dynamism and creativity that involves.

The intergenerational collaborations on *TWENTY TWENTY* were also significant to those involved, with one artist reflecting that it was humbling walking into the community centre and seeing people “do their thing” in the middle of a pandemic. There was a sense that they were “breaking all sorts of generational boundaries just being there”. Something that TP activities seem to have been particularly successful at achieving is the balance between respecting the unique voice of each participant and the communal endeavour. Jill, a participant in *TWENTY TWENTY*, reflected:

“It was so moving, it was brilliant. I was so proud of everybody that we did it and the final product was good, but for me it was getting to the end of it...It was a real journey, and...the way everybody was so involved and the way everybody had their voice heard and it didn’t matter what ability people had, that everybody was included and everybody had their own stardom in it. I thought it was really wonderful.”

A number of participants reflected on how valuable they found the opportunity to engage with people who have had different experiences from them. As Errol, a participant in Neighbourhood Voices reflected, encountering different perspectives “helps me to find my position and where I am”. One of the most transformational engagements with identity appears to have occurred in the context of the *Hear Us* project, where the discussion of personal experiences of racism had a profound effect on participants:

“I remember another participant’s monologue for the show was based on her real experiences and just because of our different races, I had never experienced [racism]...So as much as we were learning through historical facts and events that were going on around the world, we were then sort of zooming in and focusing on each other’s different lives and how different those are, but how they connect together as well.”

Betty, *Hear Us* Participant

Likewise, Hannah, another participant in the project also reflected on the value of the experience for her: “I thought it was interesting to learn more about fighting injustice...And having that opportunity to talk with other people and hear the different perspectives. Me coming from a person who has experienced racism and then hearing from others who have not”.

Artists also reflected on how working on the project contributed positively to maintaining their professional identities. At a time when many freelance theatre-makers were facing hardship, many artists reported that working on a TP project was important to them as an artist. Artists spoke of their pride at working for a respected venue like the Young Vic and of the ways in which the challenges that emerged when practice moved online often became opportunities for them to grow and develop as artist-facilitators.

Leadership, Shared Values and Best-Practice

“over the past year of trauma, [we] actively chose Joy as an act of resistance”
Shereen Jasmin Phillips, Director, Young Vic Taking Part

^{vi}Something that emerged very clearly from our conversations with the participants, artists, and Young Vic staff who have been involved with Taking Part’s projects in 2020 is how the leadership has been underpinned by the values at the heart of the Young Vic’s mission. As Director of Taking Part, Shereen Jasmin Phillips, put it: “In these times you have to work out who are you and what do you stand for.” Guided by a profound commitment to serving the community and to delivering artistic excellence, the leaders of the Young Vic delivered a year’s worth of work that was defined by community, creativity, and communication.

Lorna McGinty began her role as Participation Producer on 23 March 2020, just as lockdown began. Her role was crucial in the evolution of the Taking Part programme during the pandemic, particularly as she worked without furlough throughout the period, giving much-needed continuity and stability to the programme. The agility of response, and the culture of shared responsibility in difficult times was sustained by Lorna and Shereen. This led to a lack of hierarchy in the structure, where everyone felt included in the decision-making process.

Young Vic as a Neighbourhood theatre

When the Young Vic's team worked with a partner organisation to deliver essentials to vulnerable members of the community in March 2020, it was not just food parcels that they delivered: they also delivered printed activity packs to people in the community who did not have access to the internet, recognising the importance of staying creative to people's wellbeing. Something that was especially for those who are unable to connect with their community via digital means. As Artistic Director, Kwame Kwei-Armah, put it: "when people speak to me about what was happening at the Young Vic during lockdown... I'd literally go 'the most important thing was happening: we continued to serve our community'."

This commitment manifested itself not only in the fact that projects continued online, but also in the ways that projects were delivered. TP's commitment to its neighbourhood saw it reallocating funds from its transport budget into its tech budget to expand access and help address digital poverty. Recognising the challenges that participants might be facing in their day-to-day lives also underpinned the practice of producers calling participants if they weren't present in a session to check in with them. One of the participants who we spoke to had been unwell during the process and was grateful for the care shown and time taken by the producers to follow up with him when he was unable to attend a session. In the context of the pandemic, the care that TP's producers showed for their participants was also greatly appreciated by those we spoke to. For example, a number of the participants in the *TWENTY TWENTY* films spoke enthusiastically about the fact that they were provided with taxis to and from the film shoot, which on the one hand helped to minimise the risk of participants coming into contact with Covid-19, but also added to the sense of occasion of the filming. Jill told us that it made her feel like "a movie star".

The TP team were not only committed to working closely with local residents during this period, but also displayed great loyalty to its community of freelance artists. The last year has been a particularly difficult time for the army of freelancers that make live performance happen and TP's leadership showed a great commitment to honouring their relationships with the artists that deliver their projects. This meant supporting and enabling their artists to deliver work in a new medium, collaborating to find original ways to reimagine projects and equip the commissioned artists to lead them. Furthermore, by commissioning new work, such as *Hear Us*, TP's leadership demonstrated a commitment to continuing to make work – as opposed to simply honouring existing, pre-pandemic contracts and projects – and to working with freelancers to push the boundaries of form in order to explore important world events, such as the Black Lives Matter protests of the summer of 2020. As *Hear Us* director Jo Tyabji put it: "Yes, theatres may close, but we will be able to continue working and creating new work."

TP's leadership clearly had high expectations of themselves and this had its roots in a commitment to the community that TP serves. Shereen Jasmin Phillips asked:

“What’s the point in doing something like this if we’re not pushing the boundaries of that? What are we telling those participants if we’re not pushing the boundaries of that? Why do the creatives want to work with us if we’re not pushing the boundaries? Especially when we’re in the space where we’re tightened because of the pandemic, why aren’t we pushing the boundaries of what we can do with form?”

This clear sense of mission drove practical and artistic innovations that led to exciting developments in creative practice.

Taking Creative Opportunities

The work produced by Taking Part between March 2020 and January 2021 combined pragmatism – what can we do? What do we need to adapt? – with artistic excellence. As this report evidences, this practice pushed the boundaries of form and pioneered new artistic mediums. The can-do attitude of TP's producers played a central role in the success of the projects. As Shereen Jasmin Phillips articulated, she and her team chose to focus on their “privileges and what we hold, rather than looking at what we’ve lost”. A commitment to interrogating their options and adapting their practice was central to this approach:

“What is the way around? What can we do? What has to be cancelled? What has to be postponed? ...how are we gonna shift and pivot the projects to still make it be a big deal? What other models of work that other people are doing globally that can influence our work? What are the shifting in forms that we can do to make that happen so we’re not relying on physical space? And what can the technology we have [facilitate]?” (Shereen Jasmin Phillips)

The Young Vic was particularly well prepared for the trials of Covid-19 because experimentations with form and genre were already underway under the artistic leadership of Kwame Kwei-Armah. Shereen Jasmin Phillips reflected that under his leadership: “He’s shown from the beginning that performance can be explored in so many different ways and he’s really opened up the building to shifting in that way. And so...it expands our mind and allows us to blue-sky think.” Kwame Kwei-Armah in turn reflected that “What Shereen and Taking Part have done is pivoted within the ethos of what we do. So, again, I expect that kind of innovation to be happening, I expect that because...Shereen is an integral part of our artistic team”. Thus, the pivot to new media and online facilitation was informed by a creative approach that was already pushing the boundaries of different genre: “[it became] more about the evolution of forms and exploring the anti-disciplinary work more than anything”.

The Taking Part team was committed to ensuring that the artistic integrity of the work did not diminish in the pivot to a new medium and a significant amount of thought went into the process of reimagining the Covid-secure versions of the projects. Shereen Jasmin Phillips reflected:

“I remember when I said that I wanted to change *TWENTY TWENTY* to a film, specifically a film, Kwame was like ‘I’m into the idea of a film and not a filmed version of a play. I

want it to be what it is, not a cheap version of what it could've been.' We've now moved onto a space where we're not just responding, we're actively making a choice now."

This approach reflects TP's commitment to artistic excellence in its community practice, something that was evident in their approach to recruiting practitioners who are both excellent facilitators and artists and to producing projects that pushed the boundaries of form. The commitment to artistic excellence is reflected in the marketing of the creative outputs of the projects via the Young Vic's marketing channels and subsequent features in *The Stage* newspaper. Kwame Kwei-Armah spoke of "the quality of the artists that are coming out of our community programmes" and of the importance of considering Taking Part's work not just "the metrics through community, but the metrics through the art that is being done. And I find the art of itself to be real fun, really good, and often inspiring me to be like 'ok how do we create more work that can happen on our mainstages?'"

Shereen Jasmin Phillips's commitment to nurturing and championing playwrights during the Covid-19 pandemic was recognised in April 2021 with a prestigious Olwen Wymark Award from the Writers' Guild of Great Britain. The award recognises the encouragement of new writing. It was given to recipients who "have inspired confidence, showed sensitivity, compassion and a relentless commitment to ensure new work is made and new voices are heard."^{vii} The 2021 awards recognised the particular challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and celebrated recipients' "ability to sensitively cajole, cheerlead, challenge, empower and draw out playwrights' best work against a backdrop of ill health, cancelled shows, hastily reconvened script readings on Zoom and the myriad other challenges of lockdown."^{viii} This award recognises Shereen's skills as both an innovative artist and a supportive leader.

Communication, Conversations and Compassion

From our conversations with participants, artists and producers, it became clear that communication has been a fundamental aspect of the success of TP's activities over the last year. Artists described feeling held by the TP team and being afforded a space where they could make mistakes without judgement. At a time of great uncertainty, Shereen Jasmin Phillips focussed on being honest and open with her collaborators, sharing what she knew, highlighting what was unknown, and setting clear milestones for the projects' progress. She also involved her collaborators in decision-making process, including them in conversations about how TP planned to move forwards with each project and asking for input. The level of care taken over communication extended for the duration of each project, for example on the day that the *TWENTY TWENTY* films were launched, Shereen took the time to call or message every collaborator individually to check-in with how they were feeling about it. This approach clearly requires a significant time investment, but her collaborators reported feeling engaged and supported as a result. Communication with participants was likewise a priority for the TP team and Lorna McGinty and Lucy Dear would call participants to check-in with them and remind them about sessions.

It is noteworthy that communication channels clearly went both ways and evaluation and reflection activities were factored into each project. The group evaluation session for artists who had worked on the *TWENTY TWENTY* project was an example of best-practice; artists

were paid to attend and encouraged to reflect on a number of aspects of the project, as well as offering honest feedback about the opportunities and challenges of the project.

This two-way commitment to communication, care and dialogue reflects Shereen's leadership and her recognition of each person's individual circumstances:

When people have everything up in the air – they don't know what's happening with their money, with their contract, with the project – it's just telling them where we sit with them, what our commitment is with them, where we sit with it. Honouring people's work that they've done, understanding that they're also in a tricky situation. Understanding that this is a global pandemic, this has never happened before so we don't have the answers, this is what we're working on this week. I think people appreciated that. (Shereen Jasmin Phillips)

Compassionate leadership is a valuable quality at any time, but during a global pandemic, it was particularly valued by TP's collaborators. It worth noting is that compassion contributed to the projects' excellence, and it was clear that Shereen, Lorna and the team had high expectations from their collaborators. However, with clear communication, a commitment to creativity, and supportive leadership, artists were able to create remarkable work.

Recommendations

When the first lockdown happened on 23 March 2020, it was impossible to anticipate how theatres would respond. This evaluation evidences the creativity and resilience of everyone involved in the Young Vic's Taking Part Programme during the 2020 pandemic. The future of theatre should be inspired by their work, and by the positive attitudes and inclusive experiences it offered under exceptionally challenging circumstances. This report aimed to capture some of the learning that happened across the Taking Part programme, and our recommendations are offered in the spirit of building on these positive experiences. We have focused recommendations on four key areas:

- 1. We recommend that best practice is shared, captured and developed.** This might be achieved by:
 - Creating a frequently asked questions pack for artists who may experience challenges with using new digital skills.
 - Planning and delivering workshops on digital theatre for young participants which explore new practices and how they can be used to inform future projects.
 - Providing training on the various digital tools which are or may be used in the creative process through interactive workshops.
 - Use the experience to inform future digital/online theatre projects and improve the experience for artists and participants who may be new to the process.
- 2. Continue to experiment with inclusive forms of creative engagement**
 - Build on the bravery and success of the 2020 programme by continuing to push the boundaries of existing forms of inclusive performance both online and in-person.

- Further strengthen partnerships and collaborations with the Young Vic's neighbourhood by planning future projects, working with artist-facilitators to incorporate innovations into existing formats, as well as seeking out artists working across new forms to continue to grow and develop practice.
- Consider collaborating with charities addressing digital poverty and digital literacy to further expand the accessibility of TP's digital work.
- Invest in digital literacy and digital training initiatives, treating them as a core aspect of the delivery of TP's creative projects.

3. Ensure Taking Part is widely recognised in the theatre sector and beyond

- Share experiences from the last year with other arts organisations, charities, and community groups, adopting a knowledge-exchange approach nationally and internationally to embed the lessons learned from 2020 in all subsequent projects.
- Collaborate with other theatres and arts organisations to champion the artistry of community work.
- Build on existing relationships with theatre critics and support a shift in the critical reception of community work.

4. Support participants, artists, producers to move out of Lockdown

- As lockdown begins to lift, consider exploring hybrid forms of delivery that include some face-to-face and some digital media to enable participants to take part in ways that best suit them.
- Consider extending the duration of remote activities or adding in extra sessions to compensate for the additional time required for online facilitation.
- Anticipate how moving out of lockdown may present emotional, physical and creative challenges to different groups participants, and consider how lessons from 2020 can support them.
- Continue to structure time for the care and compassion shown to artists and participants in the transition and the post-lockdown period.

Appendix

Reach of Taking Part 2020

Learning & Participation Strands Total		
Participants Engaged	Artists Employed	Audience Reached
143	35	1366
Neighbourhood Strand by Project		
Neighbourhood Play		
Participants Engaged	Artists Employed	Audience Reached
51	2	144
Neighbourhood Voices		
Participants Engaged	Artists Employed	Audience Reached
18	25	421
TWENTY TWENTY		
Participants Engaged	Artists Employed	Audience Reached
65	24	2641
Write From Home		
Participants Engaged	Artists Employed	Audience Reached
45	3	N/A

Figure 5 Taking Part Engagement Figures, April 2020-March 2021. NB. The audience figures are based on YouTube views and are accurate as of 26th April 2021.

Links to Taking Part's 2020 Projects

- **TWENTY TWENTY**
 - *Tapestry*: <https://www.youngvic.org/young-vic-digital/twenty-twenty/tapestry>
 - *Even At Our Age*: <https://www.youngvic.org/young-vic-digital/twenty-twenty/even-our-age>
 - *Home(Body)*: <https://www.youngvic.org/young-vic-digital/twenty-twenty/homebody>
- *Under My Barbie Duvet*: <https://www.youngvic.org/young-vic-digital/under-my-barbie-duvet>
- *Hear Us*: <https://www.youngvic.org/hear-us-digital-zine-time-to-listen>

References

ⁱ The Joseph Rowntree Foundation Rising poverty among children and pensioners shows why Covid inquiry must consider its impact | JRF; Loneliness in young people: research briefing | Mental Health Foundation [accessed 8 April 2021]

ⁱⁱ Participants on the Neighbourhood Voices, Write from Home, and Neighbourhood Play programmes and those involved with the *Hear Us*, *Under My Barbie Duvet*, and *Home 20* projects were sent a link to the anonymous survey. As is often the case with surveys response rates were mixed and we have only included findings here where a representative sample could be obtained.

ⁱⁱⁱ Young Vic, "Working Remotely Safeguarding Guidelines", <https://www.youngvic.org/remote-safeguarding-guidelines> [Accessed 11 April 2021]

^{iv} NHS, "5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing", 6 November 2019. <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing/> [Accessed 28 January 2021]

^v Lyn Gardner, “Review: TWENTY TWENTY”, 1 Feb 2021. <https://stagedoorapp.com/lyn-gardner/review-twenty-twenty?ia=757> [Accessed 1 March 2021]

^{vi} <https://twitter.com/ShereenJasmin/status/1354540726315589633>

^{vii} Writers’ Guild of Great Britain, “Olwen Wymark Award winners pay testimony to theatre’s spirit in lockdown” <https://writersguild.org.uk/olwen-wymark-award-winners-pay-testimony-to-theatres-spirit-in-lockdown/> [Accessed 11 April 2021]

^{viii} Writers’ Guild of Great Britain, “Olwen Wymark Award winners pay testimony to theatre’s spirit in lockdown” <https://writersguild.org.uk/olwen-wymark-award-winners-pay-testimony-to-theatres-spirit-in-lockdown/> [Accessed 11 April 2021]