



YOU ARE HERE

By RESTOKE

A report by
Nicola Winstanley

CONTENTS

About the project.....	3
Research.....	4
Development.....	12
Rehearsals.....	20
The Performance.....	24
The Audience.....	30
Impact.....	38

About the evaluator

Nicola Winstanley is a freelance artist and creative consultant whose primary interest is to discover and highlight the impact of creative practice in society.

She has previously compiled evaluation documents for cultural producers, Art galleries and charities in Stoke-on-Trent and has 3 years experience in public consultation around the theme of arts engagement and impact. www.nicwinstanley.com

All photography is by Jenny Harper, who followed the project from The Culture Exchanges through to the performances. www.jennyharperphotography.com

RESTOKE

.ORG.UK

ABOUT THE PROJECT

In February 2016 Restoke set out to explore themes of home, migration and culture and to create a performance that was led by true stories of migration in Stoke-on-Trent.

By holding events, classes and workshops, Restoke engaged with 79 people from 24 countries and from that, developed a cast of 14 to join their core team of dancers and musicians to co-produce 'You Are Here'. This sell-out show ran from the 5th-8th October 2016 (5 performances) and was developed and performed at The Wedgwood Institute in Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent.

This report explores how Restoke made this happen.

It looks at what it was like developing a professional performance with people who had first hand experience of the theme, but little or no experience of performing.

It discusses the challenges and the successes of co-creation, of keeping people involved and outlines what effect this method has had on the participants, the audience and on Restoke as a company.



RESEARCH

Restoke have always created performances that are inspired by real people's stories, but with this project they set out to go deeper- to carry out their research in a way that brought the people, their stories and their talents all the way through the process to the performance itself.



Restoke started by visiting local migrant and refugee community groups such as WOJA, Sanctus and The Jubilee Project and also cultural interest groups such as Carnatic music group and the Bharatanatyam dancers to raise awareness of their project and garner interest. The culmination of this initial outreach phase was 3 'Culture Exchanges'.

The Culture Exchanges were a mutual sharing events, they gave participants 10-15 minutes to present something of their own culture in whatever way they chose. The events were loosely programmed by Restoke, who had invited people they had met in their visits who already expressed their cultures in a creative way- singers, dancers and musicians for example. Others were invited to share food, describe the significance of a certain object or dress, talk about images, customs and smells. There were significant things that occurred during this process which contributed to the success of the project as a whole.

Culture Exchanges 1, 2 & 3 >



PREVIOUS PARTICIPANTS

Some participants in previous Restoke projects attended the Culture Exchanges and spoke about what it was like being involved with a Restoke production. This advocacy from fellow non-professional performers immediately set the tone for the event, putting people at ease and eager to experience what was in store.

NEED IN THE COMMUNITY

Participants commented that the Culture Exchanges felt like a welcome into the local community. Restoke found engagement at this stage incredibly easy, as simply organising and promoting the events was all that was necessary to allow the participants to do what they wanted to do- which was share their culture and learn about others'. It was immediately clear from the first Culture Exchange that the diversity and the expertise of the people of Stoke-on-Trent surpassed expectations, with audiences commenting that they would 'pay to come and see this show' and that they were surprised that some of the performers were not professional singers/dancers etc. Many people commented that they thought there should be a monthly Culture Exchange to continue what had been started.

EXPANDING HORIZONS

Each of the Culture Exchanges taught people about other cultures, art forms and customs. Many people commented that this learning was the most valuable thing about the events, and that they would be keen to learn new skills and hear more about more cultures. One significant participant, a white British man born in Stoke-on-Trent, said that the Culture Exchanges had opened his eyes- from an anti-immigration stance he went on to participate in all three of the events, collaborating with the other participants.

COMMONALITIES

Discussion of the similarities between cultures began to emerge from the second Culture Exchange onward, where participants commented that certain customs and themes described by others appeared in their own cultures in different ways. This would go on to be a strong theme in the performance itself.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration was something that happened quite naturally from the second Culture Exchange onward, where participants joined others in their performances and were inspired to respond creatively to one-another's sharing.

CO-DELIVERY

Alongside the Culture Exchanges ran a programme of workshops for beginners in dance and singing, facilitated or organised by Culture Exchange participants with the help of Restoke. This meant that Restoke could offer an expert led and authentic programme of activities for a wider community of participants to compliment the Culture Exchanges and capture more participants. This also gave the workshop deliverers more experience engaging with the wider community in the city.

ATMOSPHERE

By the end of the three Culture Exchanges, there was a palpable atmosphere of openness and acceptance of anyone's cultural life and experiences. This was exemplified by the last performer, drag king 'Papa Cherry' who performed a song and discussed LGBT culture in the UK. This left the group with another realm of cultural exploration available to them, and a feeling that together they had created a safe space where everyone's culture could be learned about and celebrated.



Previous Restoke participant describing Stoke Culture and advocating for Restoke.



Neena who contributed food to the 2nd Culture Exchange joins the traditional Indian singing performance.



Beatriz demonstrates a traditional Venezuelan carnival dance with the whole group at the 2nd Culture Exchange.

“This really is a culture exchange, because you exchange the culture out there for the one in here...”



Participants in the 1st Culture Exchange lead a Bharathanaiyam Workshop



Participant in the 2nd Culture Exchange exhibits drawings of previous participants performing at the 3rd Culture Exchange



Drag King performs at the 3rd Culture Exchange to once again expand the horizons of the group.

It's a place of love and acceptance, then you have to go back into the real world"- Culture Exchange Participant

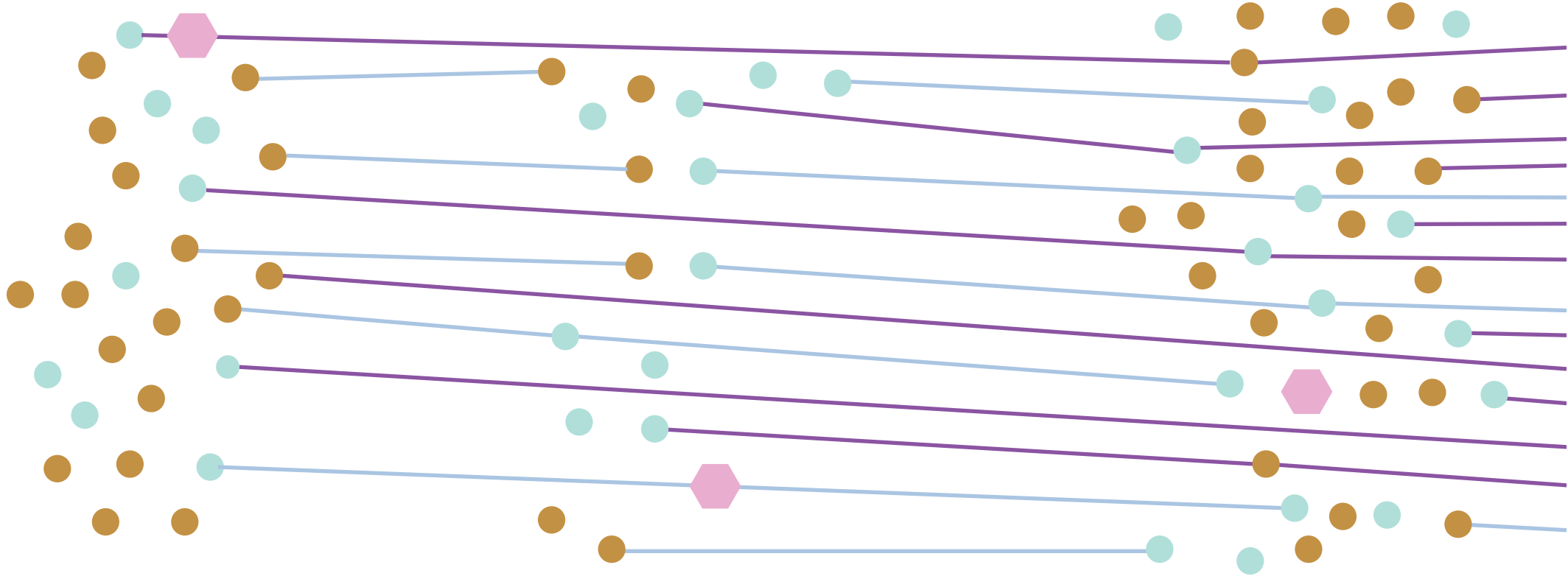
The graphic below shows the individuals that attended and performed at all three Culture Exchanges, and their journeys through the project to the final performance. As you can see, 11 of the 14 new cast members attended or performed at a Culture Exchange, which indicates that the process was incredibly successful in gathering enough personal investment from the participants to keep them engaged in the project. It is important to note, though, that to end up with a cast of 14, Restoke engaged almost 5 times that amount of people in the Research phase of the project. (Diagram key on next page)

Research Phase

1st Culture Exchange
Mitchell Arts Centre, Hanley

2nd Culture Exchange
New Vic Theatre N-U-L

3rd Culture Exchange
Sky Lounge, YMCA Hanley



Total individuals attended= 68

14 Culture Exchange attendees continued
on to the development phase >>>

KEY

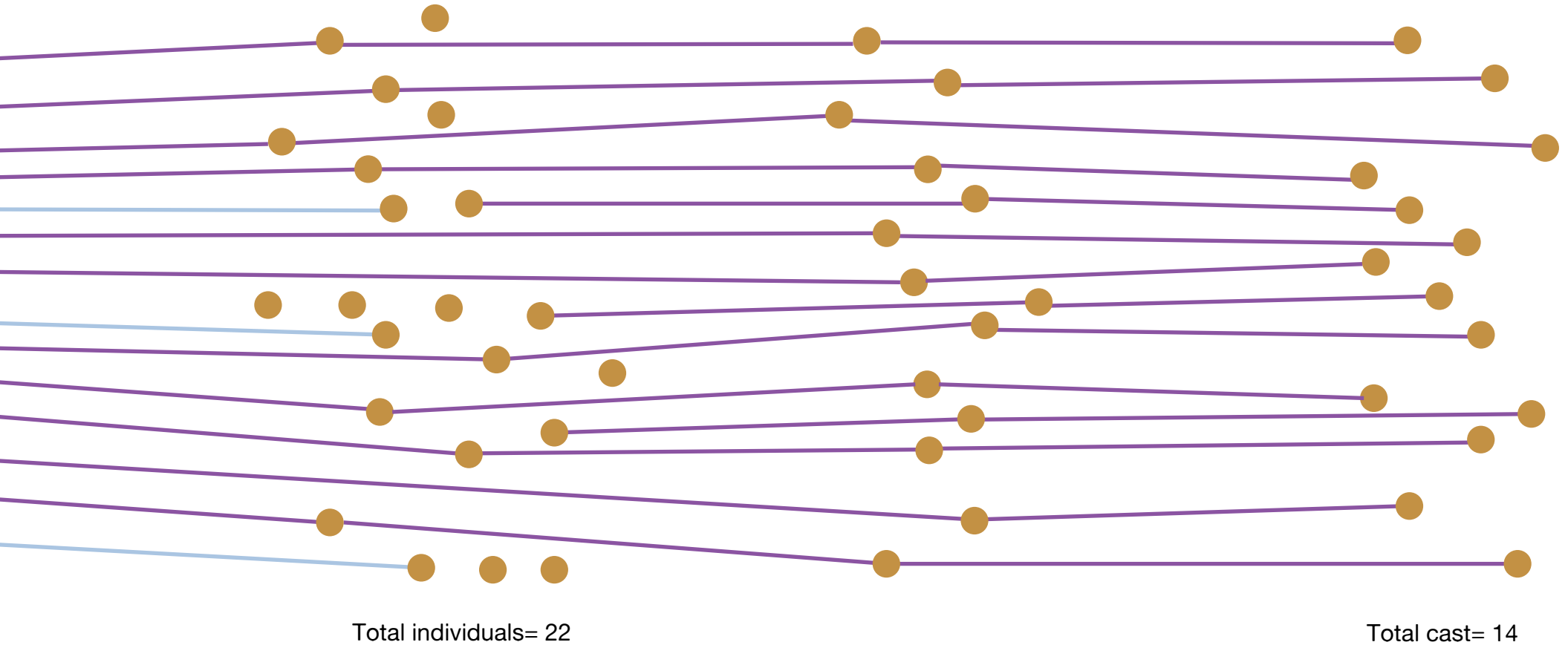
- Participant
- Performed at the Culture Exchange
- Cultural Workshop
- Journey of an individual through the project
- Journey of an Individual who became a cast member

Development Phase

Cast Workshops
Wedgwood Institute, Burslem

Rehearsals
Wedgwood Institute, Burslem

Performance
Wedgwood Institute, Burslem



11 of the people who took part in the research phase went on to become a cast member.

<<<

DEVELOPMENT

Following the success of the Culture Exchanges, 22 people plus the Restoke core team of dancers and musicians set out to develop a performance at the proposed venue- The Wedgwood Institute.

THE WEDGWOOD INSTITUTE

The Wedgwood Institute is a former Educational Institute and Library, built in the 1860's in Burslem, one of the six towns that make up the city of Stoke-on-Trent. At the time of Restoke's engagement with the building it was under the care of The Prince's Regeneration Trust, in a phase of testing and public consultation to decide future uses for the building. The Institute temporarily housed the Burslem School of Art Trust, its art library, classes and events, as well as some Haywood College classes a few times a week. With only two of its rooms in use, the vast majority of this grand and labyrinthine building lay empty in varying states of disrepair with no public access allowed. Restoke were able to secure the use of this building as a venue because their activity met the PRT's need to test the building's potential for public use and creative enterprise, even in it's current state.

Restoke used the former Children's Library as a base for their sessions, which is one of the publicly accessible rooms on the ground floor.





LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

The 22 people who joined Restoke's core team of performers in the development phase were made up of 11 people who attended one or more of the Culture Exchanges and another 11 who were encouraged to attend by friends or community groups they were part of, as word traveled about the Culture Exchanges. This was never Restoke's intention, as they initially wanted to take the project forward with only people who had shown interest in the research phase. However 3 of the 14 final cast members began their journey with Restoke at this point, so allowing this to happen turned out to be beneficial to the process and to the individuals involved.

Engaging so many people in the earliest stages of a production was entirely new for Restoke. The first development session took place over a weekend and involved lots of group discussion about migration, home and the realities of moving and being moved. This whole group conversation took up a lot of time, but was necessary for everyone to get to know each other, to bond the group together, including the participants and the core cast of musicians and performers.

At this stage in the development the conversation was broad and focused on the commonalities of migration and of what is 'home'. Individual stories seemed at this stage to be less important than the shared story of the participants, which laid the foundation for the performance and for the group itself to grow in confidence.

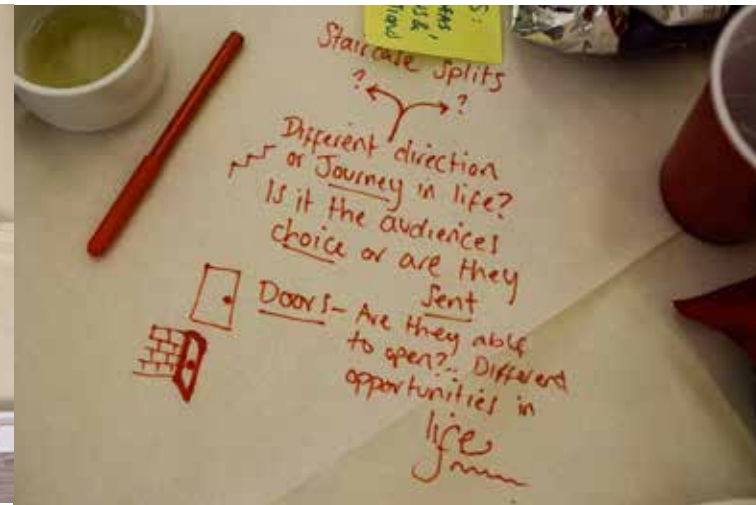
RESPONDING TO THE BUILDING

As the 1st development session continued and the trust within the group began to grow, Restoke led the participants to explore the 'safe to access' parts of the building to begin a process that previously only the directors and core team would have undertaken; to integrate the performance into the fabric of the venue. The participants were asked to describe each of the 6 designated rooms in terms of how it made them feel, taking into consideration the themes they had been discussing. The participants were then led in physical, musical and singing workshops around the rooms to explore them creatively as a group.



The group was then split into smaller groups and given a short amount of time to interpret what they had discussed in the morning through voice, music and movement inspired by each of the rooms. Incredibly, in this first weekend the group independently developed movements, song and physical narratives that would make it into the final performance.

1st development session with the participants



You Are Here- the performance

DEVELOPING A VOICE

As the development phase continued, members of the group began running their own workshops during the sessions. The focus of the sessions moved to storytelling, as participants took part in poetry and folk song workshops to build their confidence and set the tone.

Now a well bonded group, individuals felt more comfortable to share more personal aspects of their own stories and using their voices to express themselves.

Restoke, at this stage having the engagement and commitment of talented participants, focused on co-ordination, planning and observation.



COMMITTING TO THE PERFORMANCE

In the final sessions of the development phase the group were moving into the realms of performance development. The sessions that had preceded had put everyone on an even footing, with each person having a stake in the way the group's stories would be told. The performance at this stage felt like a collective responsibility to celebrate what the group had discovered and achieved together. Again Restoke acted with the lightest of touches, sensing that the group needed to be moved forward with guidance to develop scenes and bring some order to the performance.



“It’s really important the way that Restoke in this project have really taken on board everything from the culture exchanges and workshops and have allowed everyone to be involved in something and lead something and teach or share their skills and experience. This makes everyone feel like a key and important part of the story. The experience of our joint story. In the past the dancers have led the sessions and then done some improvisation but in this one every single person has something to bring. It means that Restoke don’t really have to lead, this has been really important for making the group. That’s why this feels much more personal.”- Gabby, Cast Member

“I feel that there has been an attention paid for the asylum seekers and refugees and there has been an understanding for integrating them into the community and giving them a voice because this is what they miss. Regardless of the language barrier, they don’t feel the confidence to utter their feelings. This gives them a microphone, a white paper, a camera to write their story and make it readable for any audience.”
- Ayad, Cast Member

REHEARSALS

Near the end of the final development phase Restoke directors Clare and Paul could feel some frustration in the group, a sign that they needed a more structured approach to developing the performance. On the final development day Restoke presented a rough outline of how they envisaged the final performance to be; this included 4 scenes that told the stories of individual members of the group and 4 group scenes that told the collective stories explored in the development sessions. Drawing on the strengths of smaller groups and individuals within the main group plus the core cast, Clare and Paul tasked them with draft script writing and the detailed development of their scenes, offering support and guidance and editing when needed. Restoke at this point focused on integrating lighting, sound, set dressing and costume and co-ordinated how audiences would move around the space.

Rehearsing individual stories



Rehearsing group stories

“Clare and Paul have done very well to incorporate everyone’s stories and ideas, they’ve done really well to bring them all together but left it loose enough that if anyone wanted to put anything else in they can.”

COMMITMENT

CULTURE EXCHANGES- 13TH FEB- 16TH MARCH
PREP: APRIL
DEVELOPMENT: 14TH MAY - 1ST AUGUST
REHEARSALS: 1ST AUGUST- 5TH OCTOBER
PERFORMANCE: 5-8TH OCTOBER



Rehearsals for the show began a little over two months before the opening night. In this short time costumes were made, lighting and sound rigging was installed and promotional items were created and distributed by Restoke in conjunction with The New Vic Theatre. Devising choreography and narrative development and planning how the audience would navigate the space, the Restoke directors and core team were working at full capacity, and the participants needed to invest more time and energy into the group than ever before.

It is unsurprising that at this stage, being involved in the performance became untenable for some of the participants. The group lost 11 participants in total in the run up to the rehearsals. It is interesting to note however, that 8 of the 11 people whose journey with Restoke ended here, did not attend any of the Culture Exchanges. Of the 14 people that did continue on to the rehearsal stage and the performance (including 3 people who joined the rehearsals after the development phase) 11 had attended Culture Exchanges. This signifies how important engagement in the earliest stages of research was to the commitment of the group, despite a lengthy development phase. Each of the cast members who didn’t attend the Culture Exchanges commented at the end of the project that they wished that had attended.

TIMING

Another factor in determining loss of engagement at this stage was Restoke's lack of capacity to give extra encouragement and support to the participants who might have needed to stay involved. Some but not all of these participants came to see the final performance. This is something that Restoke aim to rectify in their next project, having learned when and where time needs to be reserved to support these fragile relationships.

“We will learn from this and ensure we have the time to keep nurturing those relationships that need more attention right up until the final performance. However, every person we met and who came and talked, sang, moved with us fed into the narrative and the energy of the final piece.”- Clare Restoke Director

The schedule of rehearsals near the end of the project was intense, with scenes being worked on up until the final days before the opening night. The participants who continued on to the performance reported feelings of self doubt and that the rehearsals and the filming of the show felt rushed; that they personally didn't do justice to the magic of the live performances. At the time of writing this report, the film has yet to be edited and shown to the participants, so there is more to be learned about the affect of this lack of time near the end of the project.

Cast members also regretted that there was not enough time for the group to watch each-other's scenes with full costume, lighting and music. This is something that Restoke must ensure in future projects there is time to do.



Filming, writing scripts and music

THE PERFORMANCE

Tickets for the show went on sale on the 1st September through the New Vic Theatre box office.

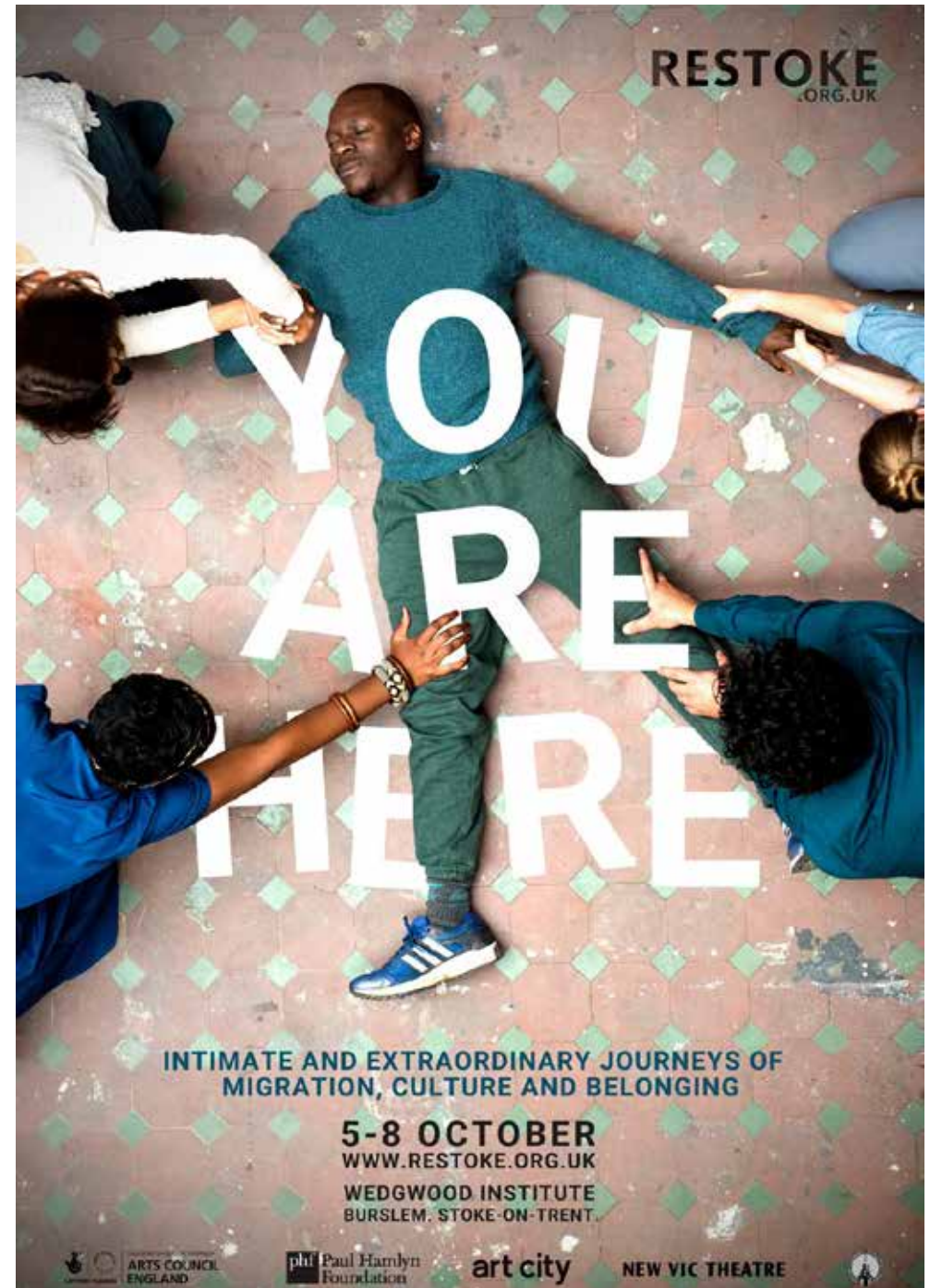
Promoting performances effectively and clearly has always been difficult for Restoke, as there are several important aspects to their work (the cast, the story and the venue) which could attract different audiences.

Regardless, all 5 shows sold out. Tickets were administrated through The New Vic Theatre, who supported Restoke's project by providing this and resources and rehearsal space.

Between the 5th and the 8th October, as well as the 5 ticketed shows, the cast also performed for filming, performed to a test audience and a group of people from migrant, refugee and asylum seekers groups that Restoke has engaged with in the earliest parts of the project.

All of the cast members who had taken part in the rehearsals continued on to take part until the end of the project.

Audiences were given either an 'east' or a 'west' ticket on arrival which determined the order in which they would experience the scenes. The two audience groups were reunited in the final scene.









CONFIDENCE

Following the busy rehearsal schedule where some of the cast members had felt somewhat overwhelmed, confidence was rebuilt through the support of the team and the realisation of the scenes.

Seeing the performance come together reinstated their confidence and drove them forward into the performances.

“When I first came to see the set I was speechless, which doesn’t happen at all. I was moved by the vision of Paul & Clare.”- Cast member

“The way it came together- there was so much depth for a show that was produced over a relatively short period of time.”- Core Cast Member

One cast member spoke of ‘crashing’ during the 1st performance, and what kept her going.

**“I stopped believing in myself, cried in the corner at the bottom of the stairs and had to really talk myself through the show. I’m stronger for it I think. I’m glad i had a strong team to literally carry me through the show. Through positivity they really carried me. I’m thankful for that”
- Cast member**

AUDIENCE INTERACTION

Many of the cast members commented that the interaction between themselves and the audience members was a significant part of the performance experience, and the entire project experience as a whole. Performers fed off the energy of the crowd, noticing their individual reactions and at times having intimate, personal exchanges with individuals during the performance itself. The intimate nature of the performance added another level of connection between the performers and the audience.

“The immersive quality added to the power and emotion of the performance and the dancers get more energy from it; more of an exchange. You can feel the people.”- Core Cast member

RE-ENGAGEMENT

The cast also put on a special performance for members of the migrant and refugee community groups Restoke had engaged with during the earliest stages of the project. This was the 2nd performance, and one where some of the cast members were performing to their friends and peers. This had an effect on the confidence of the cast, particularly in the final scene where cast members encouraged the audience to join them to dance.

Unfortunately, because of the time constraints and lack of capacity at the time of the rehearsals and performances, it was not possible to successfully re-engage all of the participants and attendees from the Culture Exchanges and development workshops. Ideally Restoke would have liked everyone who took part to have come to see the performance for free, to witness what they had a part in creating. Again, this is an issue that Restoke have learned from and will be factoring in to their next project from the outset.

THE AUDIENCE

Following the performance when the audience were lead back to the starting point and were free to buy drinks and stay to have a drink and discuss what they had seen. The 'East' and 'West' tickets that the audience members were given when they arrived (which determined their journey around the scenes) became feedback forms. Hundreds of individual comments were collected and were categorised into themes for the purpose of the evaluation.



Really moving,
touching and inspiring
evening. Fantastic music,
dance, lights and stories.
So atmospheric and a
brilliant transformation
of the building!
Thanks so much and
well done to everyone
involved. Would love
to see more things like this.

YOU ARE HERE
[/WWW.RESTOKE.ORG.UK](http://WWW.RESTOKE.ORG.UK)

MOST COMMON COMMENTS

In addition to the following themes, there were many hundreds of comments that were generally complimentary about the stories, music, costume, sets and acting, this speaks to the quality of the performance- which across the board, met or exceeded audience expectation.

Many people questioned whether the performers were actually the people they were 'playing', which shows the level of skill and confidence the participants had gained throughout the process.

Another across-the-board comment from audiences was about emotion. Many people had been incredibly moved by the performance, in many cases moved to tears. The following themes will expand on the contributing factors to the power of the performance for so many of the audience members.

EMPATHY/IDENTITY

There were many people who commented that watching the performances related directly to their experience of migration to Stoke-on-Trent or the journeys that their relatives and ancestors made to the UK from across the world.

The performance made these people feel connected to their past and their homelands, prompting some people to say it made them 'miss home'. These audience members also congratulated Restoke for presenting the theme of home in migration in this way.

"Thank you for sharing the feelings rather than just the information"- Audience Member

EYE OPENING

Audiences found the stories in the performances taught them something they did not know, and beyond that forged a new understanding of what it is to be a migrant in Stoke-on-Trent. People spoke of 'broadening horizons' and that it had made them view their home city in a new way and question their own ideas of belonging. One legacy of this reaction is perhaps more open and informed discussion between the audience members and their friends and family on the themes of migration.

"My 13 year old son and I really appreciated the 'You Are Here' theme and it has given us plenty to discuss on the way home"
- Audience Member

REAL

Several audience members commented that the real human stories made the performance powerful and more honest, particularly at a time when people mistrust mainstream media.

"Real people sharing their experiences as opposed to seeing something on TV."
- Audience Member"

There is knowing a
thing and then there
is understanding.
Beyond understanding
there is a deeper,
more profound
connection. Thank you
for showing me your
stories. I understand
now. love g11xx

YOU ARE HERE
WWW.RESTOKE.ORG.UK

INSPIRATION

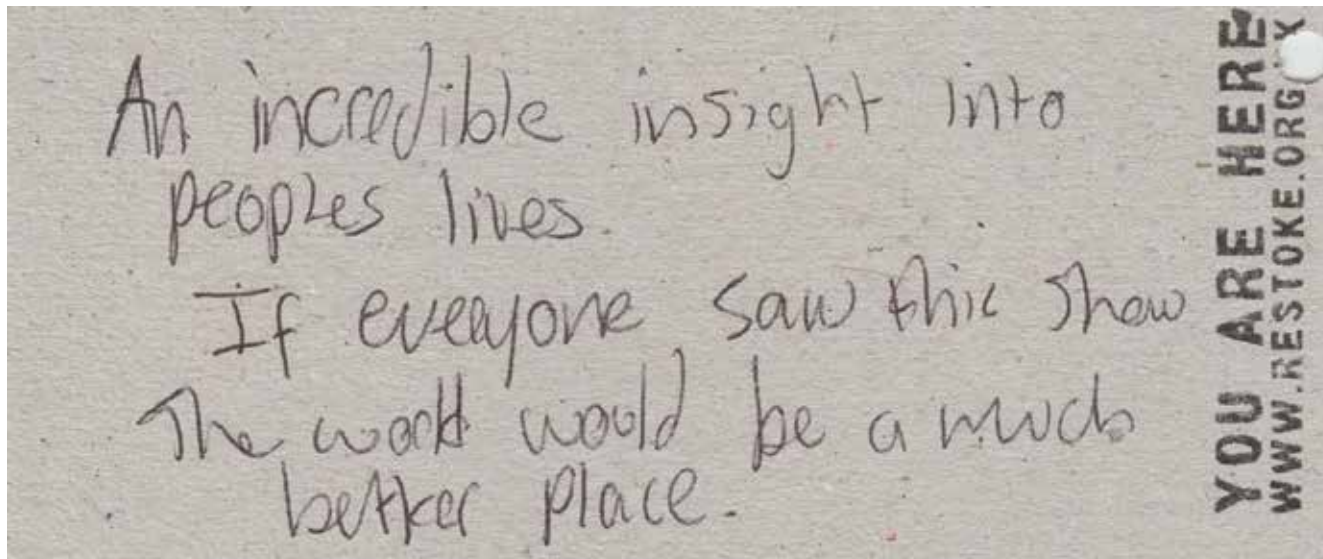
There were many comments from audience members that suggested they were inspired to learn about both the subject and Restoke's process. These audience members wanted to see and hear the stories of each of the participants, or be involved in the next Restoke production. There were also many people who wanted to buy a CD or DVD.

LOCAL PRIDE

Amongst the most local people attending the performance- i.e. people from Burslem there were lots of comments about pride. In a town that used to pride itself as 'the mother town of the Potteries', but has suffered industrial and commercial decline in recent years, these audience members felt that the performance was a reason to feel pride in the town again. They also felt that the performance was an antidote to some of the prevailing negative narratives about the city as a whole.

**"This City needs love
and this performance
gave love"
-Audience Member**

**I felt as though I
had been transported
into a collection
of different places
then I realised it
was a place I knew,
refocused through a
collection of lenses.
Mesmerising, moving
and uplifting.
Unforgettable"
- Audience Member**



THE VENUE/DISBELIEF

The Wedgwood Institute is one of the city's most iconic buildings, and yet the majority of the building has been closed to the public for many years, with its final incarnation as a library closing its doors in 2008. Many people have fond memories of the building and its closure has been a sore point for local people since then. People who knew the building were delighted to have access to it again for this performance, and were surprised by the atmosphere that was created, considering the reality of its location and condition.

“I can't believe I'm in Stoke, Burslem even!” -Audience Member

UNDERSTANDING

The only prevailing criticism of the performance by the audience was one of understanding. By its nature the stories were interpretive, being expressed through dance, song, images and poetry. Performers used their own native languages in places, which some audience members regretted not being able to understand fully. Having put this criticism to the cast following the performances, they agreed that these audience members may have been challenged by what they saw, and perhaps provoked to find out more about the subject. Going forward Restoke suggested that each of the performers and a short explanation of their journeys could appear on the Restoke website.

“My only regret is I didn't see west and east!” - Audience Member

Another issue was that some audience members thought that they had only seen one part of the performance, having been directed to go either east or west at the start. In reality the whole audience saw the same performance but in a different order. This misunderstanding was largely corrected in conversation following the performance, though it does suggest that audiences were successfully moved around the performance without them being aware of the logistics. It also suggests that this method of moving an audience had the effect of making them want to see more.

POLITICS

This project fell within a particularly turbulent time in Stoke-on-Trent and the UK as a whole, during the development phase the referendum happened, which precipitated a lot of discussion around the perception of migrants. Stoke-on-Trent in particular was singled out by the media as having one of the strongest brexit votes in the country. During the performance week, Theresa May, at the Tory Party Conference was reported as saying "A citizen of the world is a citizen of nowhere". This quote was entirely contrary to the narrative developed by the group, which shone through in the performance. Many people picked up on this, with some asking whether certain sections of the spoken narrative had been added at the last minute as a response to current affairs. Audiences felt consoled by the performance and happy to have witnessed a positive projection of the city's global community.

"Great show in brexit town"

-Audience Member

SOLIDARITY

Many people expressed their solidarity with the performers following the show. Cast members reported that at the end, people spoke to them like they knew them, sharing their own stories and asking more questions. This is a testament to the success of this personal performance, that connected deeply and directly with the individual members of the audience.

"We are what we are and we are all the same"

-Audience Member

"To be a citizen
of the world is
to be a citizen
of nowhere."

↑ Theresa May

Thank you
for providing
the best
antidote to
all things
Brexit. I
would like all
politicians to
see this performance
perform it
outside the
House of Commons!
I loved it.
Bravo.
X

YOU ARE HERE
WWW.RESTOKE.CO.UK

AUDIENCE DEMOGRAPHIC

Demographic data was collected in a fairly casual way before the performance by taking a judgment based tally of audience age groups. As such this data is by no means conclusive, but gives an indication of the age demographic.

Under 18: 1.7% 18+: 18.2% **30+: 48.5%** 50+: 31.6%

CAPTURING NEW AUDIENCES

Again, casual observation of the audience suggests that the majority were white British. Restoke had hoped to broaden this, given the theme of the production, but as previously mentioned- the time and capacity to reach out to different communities was limited. Cast members commented in an evaluation session after the performance that their friends and family were reluctant to come, saying that they were unaware of what the performance was, where it was and whether it would be 'for them'. This is certainly an issue Restoke need to address in future projects. Again, it comes back to effective marketing, considering who they wish to target. It was suggested in the evaluation session that 'word of mouth' and quotes from previous audiences could be the best way to attract new audiences.

Another observation about the audience demographic is that they were, on the whole, already sympathetic to the message of the performance; that the show may have been 'preaching to the converted'. There was some feedback from the audiences, however, that suggested their views had been challenged by the performance. One comment read 'It made me realise what a bad person I am'.

AUDIENCE BEHAVIOR

Being a promenade performance (where audience members move around the venue to watch different scenes), controlling audience movement was a key part of the production. In the first show audiences were reluctant to move right into each room, however and the performance week progressed the ushers became more confident in positioning audiences, which improved their view and their experience of the performance. Cast members also commented that when they returned to the room where the audience was left after the show, people would feel confident to talk to them if they were still in costume. If they had changed into their own clothes audience members took that as them being 'off duty' and so were less likely to approach them. This is interesting to note if the intention going forward is to encourage audience interaction with the cast.



IMPACT

THE CAST

The impact of the performance on the participants has been great and varied since most of the participants had never engaged with performing arts before. A particularly prominent impact has been the personal confidence gained by the participants. The process supported the participants through a difficult time in local and national politics, which made them more determined to have their voices heard in the city. During the project the participants have also been able to challenge negativity within their own communities, having had first hand experience that there are opportunities for friendship and co-operation in the city.

This confidence (and the quality of the performance) was most certainly a consequence of the integral part the performers played in the entire production. Their new found skills and experience in a several art forms has given the participants a voice, and has also led some cast members into further engagement with the arts, whether that is taking part, going to see other events or integrating more creativity into their own lives and work.

This project has helped some of the participants feel more rooted to the city, for some it has helped with learning English, for all it has created a new strong group of friends in which a lot of time and sharing has been invested. The project, for some, has changed their perceptions of Stoke-on-Trent entirely; from an alienating place to an inclusive and interesting place where they can be an active citizen. More like a home.

I want to be part of Stoke now and I know I can be” - Cast Member

“I remember at the Culture Exchange I started by saying “I’m sorry, I can’t sing, I can’t really dance and I haven’t brought an instrument to play, but I’m trying to find my voice again. I have so much I want to say” I have been affected, infected with the belief of Restoke and all those who were in ‘You Are Here’! I sang, I danced and shared some of my story. I’ve found my voice. I’m not sure I would have done that without this show. It’s an amazing thing to find power in your voice, your words, your view.”

-Cast Member

The project had a profound impact on the core cast also, much more than in previous projects. Some core cast members commented on having an altered outlook on other cultures and countries and have found themselves talking more openly to other people about their own cultural backgrounds. Many of the core cast members also commented that they feel privileged to have helped tell the participants’ stories having spent the time to really get to know them.

“After ‘You Are Here’ I feel at home in Stoke. I went to my home town a couple of weeks ago, it was nice but my home is Stoke now.”

- Cast Member

THE WEDGWOOD INSTITUTE

Like every Restoke production to date, the performance was site-specific, meaning the performance was designed to be performed only in The Wedgwood Institute, Burslem.

The Wedgwood Institute had been supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund to give people the opportunity to learn about the heritage of the building and test out ideas for future uses. The Restoke performance enabled The Wedgwood Institute team to test how different spaces in the building worked as performance spaces and to see what type of audience performance events brought to the building (and importantly whether this was a different audience to the ones already engaging with activities at the building, thereby extending their reach).

They found that the building can provide a very special venue for performance and requires surprisingly little intervention in terms of technical structure and set dressing to create an atmosphere. People commented on how with just a few lampshades and wooden tables and chairs one of the ground floor rooms was transformed into a cosy bar area. This idea of adding just a few design elements and letting the features already within the building do the rest is something that has filtered through to design meetings with the architects and is informing the design process.

“The building was like another member of the cast” -Audience Member

In terms of audience The Wedgwood Institute team found that the performances definitely brought a new group of people to the building, a slightly younger crowd (that might not have engaged with the building through attendance of a traditional heritage event) and a crowd that was drawn from across the city rather than predominantly Burslem-based. The performances helped them extend the groups of people engaging with the building and helped raise the profile of the building and the restoration project across the city.

The process of supporting and hosting You Are Here was however a learning curve. It was the most ambitious event they programmed during the interim period before renovations begin.

It challenged them to find solutions to a range of issues, notably the current lack of electricity supply to the first floor rooms. There had to always be a duty manager on site when Restoke were in the building. This meant a considerable amount of staff time was allocated to the project, more than was initially anticipated, in order to fully support the creative process and performances. This was useful learning which they will take it forward into planning for future events.

“The performances of You Are Here did exactly what we hoped they would do. They brought new people to the Institute, provided an exciting, creative way for people to engage with their heritage and helped promote the restoration project far and wide. Restoke’s creative work brought the Institutes’s heritage to life.” -Sarah Richardson, Events Coordinator, The Wedgwood Institute.



STOKE-ON-TRENT

At the time of writing this report, only two months have passed since the performance ended. Therefore it is difficult to predict what the legacy of You Are Here will be for the city. However there are some indications based on all the feedback collected from audiences and participants.

This performance has helped strengthen the voice of diversity in the city, giving the participants the confidence to advocate for their communities more strongly through the arts and in general. The performance could also become a point of reference for people when discussing issues of migration in the city. When the film is released (for free online) this will extend once more the reach of the performance, and also project it out of Stoke-on-Trent to counteract the prevailing reputation of the city.

Furthermore, this more positive and honest projection could help change perceptions of the city from within, which is something the city suffers with presently.

“We made this city think” -Cast Member

Many people also commented that the power and quality of the production ‘raised the bar’ in Stoke-on-Trent. In the lead up to the city’s first stage submission for the UK City of Culture 2021, this bold, high quality example of Stoke-on-Trent’s cultural fingerprint could be a jewel in the crown of the city’s current creative output.

Most significantly, the performance could help heal the rift between native and migrant communities in the city, by providing (if not at the performances themselves, but in the film, the performers and audiences) a desire to have considered and compassionate discussions about these issues in the future.

RESTOKE

One of Restoke's main aims with the project was to bridge the gap between the research and the performance. Rather than gathering information and structuring the artistic process alone, They wanted to gather the people instead and take them through the process.

Through the Culture Exchanges to the Wedgwood workshops and finally the performance, Restoke were evidently successful in that endeavor. By handing over the reigns to the people involved, recognising them as the experts in their field, Restoke produced this performance in true partnership.

Importantly, Restoke were able to intuit when the group needed guidance and when to let them lead. This influenced the performance in many ways, most noticeably the amount of dialogue increased and dance decreased. Restoke allowed this to develop naturally and with mutual trust. As a brand new way of working for Restoke, they feel they have more to learn about getting the very best out of participants, but 'You Are Here' was a large step in the right direction and yielded powerful results.

“Our role throughout this project has become more like hosts, and less like directors.” - Clare Reynolds, Restoke Director

Restoke have learned a lot about timing during this project. They have found that they should plan in more time or build capacity to support the cast and participants throughout the rehearsal and performance stage and bring back those people they engaged with from the beginning to see the performance. They are also keen to integrate costume, lighting, sound and set design earlier on in the process.

Restoke are also planning to provide creative activities between major projects for those participants who would like to continue exploring the side of themselves they discovered during the project. This could be an opportunity for advocacy in new projects- where previous participants can explain to new participants what to expect.

“Moving forward we will take so many lessons from You Are Here, we owe a huge debt of gratitude to the wonderful participants who took us on this journey and we felt privileged to be able to frame it and offer it to a wider audiences, which these stories are so deserving of. We intend to continue on the journey of co-creating, pushing the boundaries of producing work with a cast of people sharing their own experiences. Holding the integrity of the real life stories, but daring to imagine the ways and places we can weave these into performance.” -Clare Reynolds, Restoke Director.



EVALUATORS NOTE

As an arts evaluator you are always looking out for expressions of the value and impact a project has had on its participants. After the final performance, the whole cast arranged a vigil around the map (part of the set design) to express their friendship with each other and their gratitude to the Restoke directors. This is a perfect example of the success of Restoke's entire project, where every participant has equal value and importance in the group and true connections had been forged. I cannot see how 'You Are Here' could have been so powerful and successful if it wasn't for their deft approach to the research and development. I wish them every success in challenging and developing this method further in their next project.

"IT HAS BROUGHT WONDERFUL PEOPLE INTO MY LIFE. MOST OF ALL I UNDERSTAND NOW BETTER WHAT COMMUNITY ART IS SUPPOSED TO BE. TO RESEARCH PATIENTLY AND THOUGHTFULLY, LISTENING FOR THE STORIES PEOPLE NEED TO TELL, AND BRINGING ALL YOUR RESOURCES AND EXPERTISE TO ENABLING PEOPLE TO SHARE THOSE STORIES. ART, COMMUNITY BUILDING, HEALING, COUNSELING ALL IN ONE. I WANT TO DO THIS IN SOME FASHION, OR MAYBE MANY DIFFERENT WAYS, FOREVERMORE."

- ROBYN, CAST MEMBER.

