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Transforming Arts Scotland

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Arts week, April 2002

THIS WAS the third Arts Week, all of which have been held in Moffat.

There were 21 participants at this Arts Week; from Stornoway, Skye, Fort William, Aberdeenshire, Edinburgh, and Dumfriesshire. Numbers were lower than last October – partly due to exams looming on the horizon.

For the first time we made attempts to attract a wider range of participants from around Scotland and from the Moffat and Dumfries area; however, this was not successful this time, and we shall need to consider the reasons for this, and evaluate what we should do next time.

The dance/theatre remains the main focus of activity, and a firm favourite. Many thanks should go to the dance trainers for their special efforts in this area.

Drama, drawing and singing were also offered as part of the programme. Many, many thanks to Carrie Varjavandi, Carolyn Fox, John Treeby and Maitri Mehrabi, for assistance with these.

Themes which emerged as being of importance to those attending, included issues of inclusion and exclusion; listening to and respecting others; the nature and development of the human soul/ human being; life after death; how TAS activities relate to social and economic development; and Unity.

There was a portion of those attending who would have liked more opportunity for questions and discussion. This may be well worth exploring in the future. Increased Social Time at this event was greatly appreciated by many, as they felt they had more opportunities to get to know each other. This time

included games in the park, visits to the boating pond, walks and the usual visits to the Moffat Toffee Shop, Ariete and other local venues!

A special thanks needs to go to Sahar Freemantle for her creative input into the week her assistance with



Erin Keenan. Trainer for Northern Lights



And there was some training too



Old guys get in on the act



the social time activities, and for the beautiful Tranquillity Zones which helped create a special atmosphere, and offered a space to wind down at the end of the day.



Organisers, Vahid and Nicky Mehrabi

We were delighted to have a last minute performance on Saturday night, of the Ruhi Group who were in training in Moffat during the week running up to the Arts Week.



Preparing for the catwalk night

We were treated to a series of very good musical and dramatic sketches, performances and presentations – some funny and some serious – but all of which were very inspiring!

One of the parents kindly offered to bring in a projector and video player in order to show a film one evening (which was chosen by vote and kept to an age 12 rating).

The audience for our own “In House Show” was padded out with a selection of extra faces such as a representative from the local arts association and youth workers from the locality, a number of local youth and a local mum with two children who had seen the public performance last April.



Lawrence of Arabia/Alford

We hope that these positive links may prove helpful in the future in terms of reducing the tension with local youth, which has always been an issue.

The Show included a number of the dances learnt this week, some individual performances – including violin, live voice box and break dancing, and some small humorous skits as interims – two short sketches and some presentations of stories and poetry.



A famous comedian dropped in for some interviews

The aim was to create an event where fear of failure has no place, and everyone feels included and valued for who they are. This is a goal that can have no limit, and there is always more to be achieved.

The evidence of any achievement of this kind is seen in the overall quality of social involvement of all those attending, the creative participation and the variety of expression that reveals itself during the sessions and during the opportunities for presentations.

There were many new talents and characteristics which emerged during the week, and there were many friendships (new and old) which were deepened. Confidence increased visibly in many cases, and there was a strong sense of caring for each other amongst those attending.



A new international language?

The open expression of ideas and thoughts in relation to any aspect of the event is also a very good qualitative indicator. The quantity of this, and the manner in which it takes place are very good indicators of a healthy learning and growing environment.

At each event so far, there has been a very noticeable increase in the extent to which participants feel free to talk, offer ideas, and raise problems, and this is one of the things which some youth express satisfaction with. It is particularly noticeable where there are new participants, who know few or no other members of the group at the start of the week.

Opportunities for consultation with the whole group was part of the first session every morning, and a suggestion tin was made available for anonymous comments or requests. The adult helpers involved made it a habit to enquire how individuals were enjoying the week; or to pick up on any signs of distress or exhaustion.

The young participants offered their thoughts and criticisms in a polite manner without any need for adult criticism.

There are two elements which should not be ignored and which have contributed strongly to the positive atmosphere created at each event so far: these are the practice of the “Quality Jug” (where anonymous notes can be placed, which nominate individuals for any positive inner/spiritual qualities they have shown), and the “Prayer Buddies” (an activity that involves each person picking an unknown name out of a pot, and focusing on increasing their knowledge of that person and saying prayers for them or making small hand made gifts for them – this ends in a session where each individual describes their prayer buddy’s inner qualities – accompanied often by enthusiastic guessing – before revealing who they are).

They have never been enforced elements of the program. They have always been the result of suggestions from the youth attending. We hesitate to make it “official” yet it has certainly been extremely popular, and a contributory factor to the positive atmosphere created each time.

The atmosphere is influenced by the blending of input from all those participating – whether as helpers or as guests; so the success of the event in this respect is very much due to all those who attended and helped create this atmosphere.

All those who came, in whatever role or capacity, should congratulate themselves for this success.

The venue is still undeniably basic, although improvements have been made every time we come back. The lack of luxury however is reflected in the price, which we struggle to keep down to a minimum, in the hope that this makes it more inclusive.

Many thanks must go to our cook and kitchen staff – Wendy & Christine – for the week, who worked extremely hard to provide for our needs. Baking was in abundance, and hygiene has never been so high.

We hope to be able to provide another Arts Week in October. In the meantime we are working on a variety of smaller opportunities for performance and workshops in local areas, and on some possible Summer service opportunities.

Vahid and Nicky

