



## Evaluation for Investing in Children membership

### The Turrets

The Turrets is a drama group base in Barnard Castle, for young people aged 9 to 18 years. There are five groups who meet on a weekly basis at Witham Hall and Teesdale School. There are over 90 young people involved with the Turrets groups. The group was started in 1995, and was taken on by Jill Cole in 1997, with approximately 12 young people involved at the time. Jill has seen the group grow year on year, and it is clear from this that the activities are popular with young people. The group receives funding from the Children's Fund, and some money from the local authority, although this may not continue. The Castle Players is an adult drama group which parents the Turrets and there are opportunities for the two groups to work together.

For the purpose of this evaluation I had the pleasure of meeting with Jill and many of the young people who are part of the Turrets, as I went along to three of the five groups.

### **Evidence of Dialogue and Change**

Each group meets weekly, and each session is varied depending on what the young people want to do. Often the sessions start with games, and these are chosen by the young people, one young person told me, **"I like the fact that even if it's just games that we play we get to choose."**

Another young person said, **"We sit in a circle and each say a word to tell a story and carry it on."**

Sometimes a small play is made up based on the story that gets made up.

One group told me, **"We start plays. Use our own ideas; we come up with them ourselves."**

They went on to say, **"When we do things for plays, you can suggest parts and have a go."**

A lot of time is spent improvising and trying things out and the young people all feel that they are in a supportive and secure environment to do this.

**"You never feel pressurised into anything you don't want to do."**

**"Everyone's friendly and supportive."**

**"There's a box of hats, you pick a hat, wait at a bus stop and improvise."**

**"There's always a nice atmosphere, never any bullying, there are little jokes in drama, but it never carries on out of the group."**

### Performances

All groups are working towards performances. One group I visited had taken part in a circus skills workshop and were working on using those newly learnt skills to make up a performance. One young person has been practising riding a unicycle, another has been honing his skills with a Diablo, others are stilt walkers, and others acrobats. Everyone got to do what they felt comfortable with. This group told me, **"There's teamwork, we work as a team, no-one ever gets left out."**

The group told me, **"Last year for our play we all had ideas, it was thought up by us and Jill wrote it up."**

One group of young people took a production of Othello to the Edinburgh Fringe festival in 2006, which received excellent reviews. There are plans for two plays to go to the festival this summer.

Turrets have also been asked in the past to work with the community. They have produced heritage tours for Witham Hall, and also some work for PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Services) to look at problems which exist for the public during consultation.

### Residentials and Trips

The young people at Turrets have opportunities to not only perform at events like the Edinburgh Fringe Festival but also to meet with other youth theatre groups at the Big Youth Theatre Festival held in Epping every year. One group told me, **“We meet up with Jackass, we do team building, and watch other plays. We have fun, make friends.”**

Young people also get to watch other productions, **“We get to talk to the people in it.”**

### Arts Awards

There is the opportunity to work towards an accredited Arts Award, which is the equivalent to the Duke of Edinburgh Award. One young person told me, **“We go with Andrew, we give ideas and get advice about making it into a play.”**

Another young person said, **“Andrew listens to anything we have to say.”**

It is clear from meeting with Jill and Andrew, and Rupert who is a volunteer and ex-Turret and also the many young people who make up the Turrets that is a very relaxed, well-attended and well-loved group. As one young person said, **“Everyone has different things about them but still you fit together and you feel like you belong.”**

Each person is valued and respected as an individual and can express themselves, a young person said he enjoyed **“dressing up in stripy rainbow coloured stilettos and red and white polka dot dresses.”**

The young people attending Turrets feel they are able to influence the development of Turrets as it is built around them. The group receives funding from Children’s Fund and the monitoring forms provide further evidence of young people’s involvement (see attached).

When I asked if Turrets should receive Investing in Children membership all of the young people I met gave a resounding YES! And so I have no hesitation in agreeing with the young people in recommending that Turrets receive their membership.

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