

disPlay 4

An 18 month journey towards
production, and beyond...

Who this report is for

This report is for playwrights, writers, for disabled artists working in any discipline, those who make work with them and those who fund and support them.

It is written by the Project Director and includes reflections from all 4 writers, the partnership of three companies and the Project dramaturg.

thanks

funders

Damien Robinson at what was the Employment Unit at the Arts Council of England

Mary Ellen Marziale at The Belvedere Trust

The Bridge House Estates Trust Fund

This report is part of Creative Renewal, funded by the European Social Fund via the Equal programme

partners

Soho Theatre. In particular Jo Ingham, Lin Coghlan, Paul Sirett, Ruth Little and Anne Mosley

Graeae Theatre Company. In particular Jenny Sealey and Roger Nelson

steering panel

Paul Sirett, Jenny Sealey, Jonathan Meth, Damien Robinson,

and especially to both the dramaturg, Kaite O'Reilly and writernet's Information & Research Consultant, Sarah Dickenson

© Jonathan Meth March 2003

Contents

Danny's view	4
Origins of the project	6
What we wanted to do	7
Funding	9
Dramaturg	10
The structure of the scheme	11
Selection	13
The Process	15
Showcase	19
Disability Awareness	22
Reflection	24
Phase 1 feedback	25
Employment	31
Phase 2	32
Sample notes on Career Development	33
Production	35
Kerry's (re)view	37
Jamie's view; Phase 2 Feedback	38
Additional Learning Points	40
Why the project mattered	44
Coda	46

Danny's view

Instead of an executive summary - or for those in a hurry - here is one writer's account of what happened...

"A seasoned campaigner. An old lag. Been there etc etc. That's me with writer's workshops and projects of one sort or another. You get a little jaundiced. To say the least. So when I saw disPlay4 advertised in the Disability Arts press, it was more a reflex action than "Wa-hay! This could be my big break" - that made me stick a film script in an envelope and send it to London. And then forget about it...

I was living in Derby at the time, coming to terms with a new job and whiling away the odd hour or two staring at my computer and wondering where the hell the inspiration had gone. Since my MA in Screenwriting in 1998, it had all gone wrong. A short-lived agent who thought telepathy was the only means of communication. Ill health. On the employment treadmill, my work-a-day skills in demand and putting bread on the table. What I wanted to do - WRITE - dissipating in a fog of database maintenance and living for the weekend.

So there I am in a little box flat in Derbyshire - waiting... And I am invited to an interview in London at the Soho Theatre! I'm chuffed. Just about. Torpor's a hard thing to shake off. But I'm Dick Whittington off to London. And something stirs...

I am interviewed by Jonathan Meth, head honcho and driving force of WRITERNET. Jenny Sealey, Artistic Director of GRAEAE Theatre Company. Paul Sirett, Literary Manager of SOHO Theatre. And Damien Robinson from the Arts Council. The interview is a whirl of hands (Jenny's deaf and needs an interpreter) and questions. I leave a little disheartened. Put on the spot about commitment to theatre and drama and my motives - I do my usual and blurt away. It's a toughie. On the train back I put it all down to experience and resign myself to missing the cut...

Then - the call comes. And I am one of the four chosen! Am I chuffed? What do you think?

What is disPlay4? Writernet organised a writer mentor scheme about 4 years ago. The aim to team 9 Disabled writers with 9 working professional writers. Mentors included: Patrick Marber, Alan Plater and Kaite O'Reilly. The year-long scheme was a success. But someone asked the question: "OK. Schemes are fine and dandy but - where's the meat? Something that provides real opportunities for Disabled writers?" DisPlay4 was born. A year long project that took in workshops, guest speakers

from stage, screen and radio. And, the real meat of the project, a commission to write a play that would be considered for production.

Four writers – Kerry Hood, Angela McNab, Jamie Beddard and me! – came through a busy year, which culminated in showcase readings of our work at Soho Theatre. For two weeks in November 2001 we enjoyed an intense period of working with actors and directors to shape our emerging dramas into something professional and ready to stage. For me this was the highlight of disPlay4 – an introduction into the practicalities of theatre, away from angst ridden hours in front of the word processor. Adrenalin. Excitement. Satisfaction. And for all of us, whether our plays made the grade or not, the sense that we are not working in a vacuum. (Although I do sometimes feel myself gasping for air!)

The outcomes? Kerry's play produced and played to great reviews at the Soho Theatre. Angela and Jamie moving on with great work in radio and forum theatre.

And me? As a result of the showcase I made contact with the Literary Manager of the Stephen Joseph Theatre and have a One Act play – The Anniversary Waltz – playing in Scarborough next year. I have two new plays in post first draft action - engines revving. And ideas spilling out of me ears! Hopefully doors are opening. I can feel the draught!

DisPlay4 – just another project? Don't think so, mate! I'm still on the work-a-day treadmill but my enthusiasm has been replenished and I'm in there fighting!...And, if anyone is looking to commission a new play – my name's DANNY START!"

Danny Start
October 2002

Origins of the project

disPlay4 has important antecedents

In response to the lack of work being produced by disabled playwrights writernet undertook the research for a London Arts Board (LAB) funded guide for disabled writers, to map existing provision and identify priorities. ***Theatre Writing - A Guide for Disabled Writers*** was ultimately published by LAB in March 2000. Out of this research and in addition to the provision of information, advice and guidance, there emerged a need to change the attitudes that encouraged the development of disabled writers' work. A need to explore alternative ways to proactively support the careers of disabled writers was also identified. This was demonstrated very practically when writernet was subsequently approached by Graeae, to try to address the lack of good quality scripts emerging from disabled writers - so that the company could place a greater emphasis on the commissioning, development and production of new work.

This resulted in the first collaboration between **writernet** and **Graeae**. In association with New Writing North, we undertook a year long mentoring scheme for 9 disabled writers during 1999 - partnerships between disabled writers (mentees) and more experienced (and not necessarily disabled) counterparts - overseen by an Advisory Panel of experienced individuals and representatives from the new writing and disability theatre sectors.

Mentors were: Patrick Marber, Mark Ravenhill, Lucinda Coxon, Sarah Woods, Philip Osment, Elizabeth Melville, Kaite O'Reilly, Ann Coburn and Alan Plater.

The scheme provided a vital opportunity for writers to learn and to work towards completing first drafts of material. Less than 1 month after the completion of the scheme 2 writers were already under commission, and Graeae produced and toured Peter Wolf's *Into The Mystic*. Further details can be found in the ***Disabled Writers Mentoring Scheme Report*** available free from the writernet office.

What we wanted to do

Rather than simply repeating a successful scheme, writernet and Graeae elected to evaluate next steps in terms of strategic implications. A range of needs emerged from the scheme, particularly in the final mentee evaluation meeting. Following further consultation with the sector, responses to these needs were synthesised into two projects. For 10 emerging writers: a week long residency, **Lemonia** at Holton Lea, near Poole in Dorset in the Spring of 2003.

But the call was also for a project which would meet the needs of more experienced theatre writers: **disPlay4**.

This gave rise to an apprenticeship for those writers who needed the support of fuller integration into theatre practice. It would also give them both paid time and incentive to produce a draft ready for production consideration. Through Soho Theatre's unique Writers' Centre, this apprenticeship would extend beyond theatre to cover writing for radio and television.

Soho Theatre wanted writers on disPlay4 to have the best shot at getting produced. At every stage writers would have access to what was happening at Soho. The Attachment Programme, which playwright and tutor Lin Coghlan was running, would operate as a sister course. The Writers Festival at Soho Theatre at the end of November/beginning of December, would provide an important platform for the work via rehearsed readings by the disPlay4 writers.

In addition to offering a fantastic opportunity to four writers **Graeae** were now committed as a company to new writing. This initiative would further enhance their opportunity to produce and commission, without placing all the onus for the development of disabled writers on their shoulders.. Artistic Director Jenny Sealey wanted the disPlay4 writers to feel that they had a similarly open invitation to that provided by Soho Theatre, to engage with the company and its work. She stressed that some artists mistakenly believe that they must address so called "disabled content" in order to interest Graeae. Jenny wanted to see a wide range of individual voices which may or may not feature such content.

In addition to providing overall project management, **writernet** wanted to feed in career development materials and be responsible for processes, such as Continuing Professional Development (CPD), employment and evaluation. As part of Creativepeople, the Arts Council of England initiated CPD framework, writernet wanted to use disPlay4 as an opportunity to test different formal learning tools, capitalising on the wider knowledge available through the consortium providing the framework.

While Soho Theatre Company (STC) and their Writers' Centre would provide a base for the apprenticeships, it was also expected that as part of their attachment disabled writers would subsequently form relationships with other companies, further increasing their chances of production.

From January 2001 **BBC Radio Drama** were starting The Exchange -

"... a long term initiative, the aim of which is to promote the exchange of experience between people already working at the BBC and professionals with disabilities who are not. Main activities include 2 introductory series of workshops for writers - including mentor support, with a view to producing short pieces of work for radio, tv and on-line".

Producer Kate Valentine was the point of contact, and producer Polly Thomas was also involved up in the North West. Kate was aiming to find a mixture of established professional writers and those whose potential had not yet been realised, but within the context of gaining production opportunities based entirely on quality. She was aiming for the writers to have radio material ready for the offers round in about a year. We agreed to collaborate on talent search, by sharing ideas and names gathered, comparing shortlists, and to avoid duplicating candidates selected.

Funding

With significant support from the ACE Employment Team and investment from the Belvedere Trust and the Bridge House Estates Charitable Trust, the scheme was now fully funded as per the original budget costings.

The "apprenticeships" were developed with ACE Employment Unit support so that the writers were not only given developmental opportunities but briefed/trained on a range of issues relating to self employment (i.e. Tax and N.I., Disability Service Team, benefits implications, linking rules) to enable them to reach a point where they could decide if self-employment (or short term work such as residencies or similar opportunities) was the way forward for them. The focus was on empowerment towards employment.

Some feedback was specified on employers'/hosts' attitudes (what barriers they felt there were, what information would have helped them in advance) that could be built into information the Employment Team provided in the future.

Finally, it was decided to "track" the apprentices for a period of time following the programme to enable us to see what worked for them in terms of impact on their career development and what was less useful.

It was agreed to offer apprenticeship writers a commission structure: so an initial fee of £2,600 as per the original budget. Should STC want to move to a second draft (or beyond) it was agreed that the second year of their funding from Bridge House Estates could be used to underwrite this (the first year's allocated tranche would contribute directly to these fees). In this way the scheme would offer a standard professional contract, indicative of its status, and a (minimum) clear goal of a first draft.

It was decided not to call the project an attachment to avoid direct comparisons with STC's regular attachment programme. A better title would be found: **disPlay4**.

Dramaturg

The Dramaturg needed to be someone experienced. Candidates were brainstormed by the Steering Panel. To establish clear boundaries, the dramaturg would have responsibility for all matters relating to script development or practical aspects of STC's provision. Any other matters would be referred to the Project Director.

Kaite O'Reilly was our first choice. As well as a practicing and successful writer in a number of media, Kaite had worked as a mentor on the previous writernet/Graeae project and was able to draw on her wide experience of teaching on the MA in Glamorgan, and at Ty Newydd. She knew the context in which we were working and had experience of being disabled herself. Fortunately, Kaite was both available and delighted.

We agreed that Kaite would lead workshops on writing for theatre as well as radio drama and television, following her training with BBC 2 and BBC Television Wales, in single television drama and serials. She would also provide individual attention as a dramaturg; reading the 4 developing scripts, giving positive, constructive feedback, and constant encouragement, also recognising weaknesses (eg characterisation) and providing 'strengthening' sessions – bringing in other specialists if required. 'Specialists' suggested by her would be invited after prior agreement with myself.

Other responsibilities included:

- to try and keep the thread of theatre-writing and the first draft commission unbroken during other experiences in different mediums
- to recognise when the writers needed to be left alone so they can immerse themselves in a new experience
- to recognise when they were unhappy and need help
- to keep a 'pastoral' eye on their experiences
- to give support in preparation for a specialised event (eg pitching to BBC script editors)
- to provide a space for feed-back and 'decompression' after such an event, if necessary.

Finally, to feed-back to me as Project Director.

Originally it was thought that it would be a very good training opportunity for that person to be shadowed (and given some admin. support) by a less experienced colleague, but this would prove impractical owing to the decreasingly centralised point of delivery of the programme and increasing emphasis on the dramaturg's individual support for the 4 writers.

The structure of the scheme

Spending 2 hours with Lin Coghlan was fundamental to the success of the project, as it allowed us to reflect on a similar process which writers had just gone through under Lin's supervision of the inaugural Soho Theatre Writers' Attachment.

She spoke about trying to get the balance between good and comfortable; the need for debates around ethos and purpose; getting the plays out of the writers while at the same time developing the writers. Part of it was about writers being taken seriously: a response to what typically happens to young writers and their need for tangible, practical advice for surviving in radio, tv and film. She stressed the advantage of the mix of produced and unproduced writers; differences in age, experience, culture.

We then moved on to the ingredients required to make the course work. There might be distrust in the early stages of the course – preparedness to share ideas cannot be taken for granted. Writing in pairs/threes, early on – working together, the writers liked talking together, but hated exposing ideas. Team building identity as a group is important, as were strategies for them to relax outside the session, such as seeing work as a group, towards creating a support network.

Kaite and I realised flexibility would be key. Flexibility around the size of taught units, which could be weekly x 2 hours or fortnightly x 4 hours or an intensive weekend; because we didn't yet know the location and communication / mobility needs of the 4 writers.

We considered the possibility of creating distance learning modules. This suggested a structure of 3 x 7 week terms; interspersed with 2 x 6 weeks writing and a final fortnight of rewrites before the concluding staged readings.

The project was scheduled for the calendar year 2001, with recruitment in January/February and the apprenticeships beginning in March. Project planning had been ongoing since September 2000.

The scheduling of activity was dependent on a combination of the writers' levels of experience and desired focus for the year, and drew from different models to create an individually tailored package for each writer.

The project offered the 4 writers a commission to first draft, it would also have practical workshop sessions (the 'term times' negotiable once the geographical location of the writers was known, plus their individual requirements), with scope for individual dramaturgical sessions. Sessions from the dramaturg as workshop co-ordinator, but also specialised

sessions on writing for radio and television. At the end of the attachment writers were expected to produce the first draft of a new full length theatre piece.

This drew on the existing STC attachment programme model, which had been designed to create a number of known "beats" throughout the writers' year, enabling them to plan their workload accordingly. Where appropriate writers would meet as a group, but there would also be individual tailoring depending on interests and needs. There would also be opportunities for working with the 6 writers on the main STC Attachment programme. The project would be careful not to overload writers, but to manage their year in such a way as to provide a rich experience.

The project thus aimed to develop the script and the writer at the same time. Dramaturgy would go on within the practical sessions. It would end with rehearsed readings/workshops on scripts with professional actors and directors.

We considered the possibility of course accreditation. Kaite was able to create a course curriculum as she had written these for both BA and MA level. In the event we took on board that Lin had not chosen the accreditation route owing to the seemingly difficult requirements of academia. Kaite's preferred approach was also more interactive, one which tested models....

Selection

Sourcing Writers

Writers were sought for the scheme via an extensive open access process, stipulating specific criteria commensurate with the desired level of expertise, but designed in such a way as to be as inclusive as possible. At the same time the Steering Panel brainstormed possible candidates. We were after the best writers....

The advert

disPlay4

writernet, in association with Soho Theatre Company and Graeae are seeking 4 disabled writers to undertake disPlay4: a cross media development programme and play commission.

The best 4 disabled writers from across the country will be commissioned to each write a stage play. Throughout 2001 they will also have access to a specifically designed development programme, which, based at Soho Theatre's Writers' Centre in London, and in collaboration with the BBC and Channel 4, will extend from theatre into radio and television.

Interested?

Please send:

a completed script in any medium

a CV

a letter of application, outlining what you would hope to gain from the programme....

Deadline for submissions is: Monday January 29th 2001

If you'd like any further information you can contact

Jonathan Meth, Writernet, Cabin V, Clarendon Buildings, 25 Horsell Road, London N5 1XL

020 7609 7474, writernet@npt.easynet.co.uk

Supported by:

Bridge House Estates

Belvedere Trust

Arts Council of England

disPlay4 Interviews

I read all the entries to the project and short listed possible candidates for the panel to read, according to the criteria we had already agreed.

The interview focused on teasing out where the writers were in their career trajectory, whether they really wanted to and could write a first draft stage play and how they would manage their learning.

From 6 candidates we chose our 4 writers. I then organised follow-up sessions with the two unsuccessful ones.

The Process

Characterising the three term programme

Around the set, weekly group sessions the writers would also receive face-to-face dramaturgical support on their own scripts. These would be interspersed with six-weekly periods just for the writers to write. Dramaturgical support via phone and email was provided throughout. The weekly meetings were fine for the first term, but it soon became clear that the travel was proving exhausting for two of the writers in particular. So we decided to meet for a longer session, fortnightly and continue the momentum via phone and email support.

Responding to the feedback question: "How did the project's attempt to balance learning and working operate for you?", one writer said: "It was useful coming down to London each week for the first few months in order to gel as a group and get to know how we will work. But being chronically ill and disabled it also made me very tired and so slowing down the meetings later on was a good move for me. I appreciated my disabilities being taken into consideration as I often feel guilty if I cannot fulfil my promises/deadlines".

So much of the connective tissue between sessions was provided by Kaite's tireless commitment to organisation, clarification, good communication and ability to keep each writer moving forward. With writers based in Birmingham, Bristol, Liverpool and London and Kaite shuttling between Exeter and West Wales, email exchange became a crucial component of the project.

The following pair of emails from Kaite encompasses the complexity of what we were aiming to achieve:

"Re-our 'interim' meeting on Thursday 28th June in London at Soho Theatre:

As you know, the session is primarily so you can meet individually with Paul Sirett, Literary Manager, and discuss the ideas for your play. Paul would like to have a short description of your play in advance - he requested half a page of A4 or so. I've requested you all get a copy of this proposed document to me by 20th June via e-mail - giving time for reflection and revision, if you wish, as well as time to post the things to Paul. As well as outlining the story, do consider a brief description of principle characters, tone of the play, setting, etc.

I'm waiting to have confirmation re-what time Paul would like to see you individually, but wanted to get some thoughts of what else you might like to do with that day.

I'm not convinced a 'workshop' experience would be best after having a one-to-one with Paul. I imagine your minds will be buzzing, full of thoughts and developments after your discussion. It may be good to have a 'decompression' period after - I know that's all I ever want to do after a meeting with a dramaturg/literary manager! (and I usually like to go off and have a coffee by myself for half an hour or so, reflect, get my thoughts in order and then talk about it with someone else!)

Depending on the timing from Paul, I'd like to run a few things past you, to get your feed-back: How about trying to meet as a group one hour before Paul's sessions begin - as a 'warm-up' - to outline ideas and share developments with one another?

Reflect on what you might like to do whilst waiting to see Paul/after seeing Paul before we reconvene as a group. Remember you can call Jo at the Soho and book a writer's room/use of computer should you so wish. I'm keen to have a 'decompression' period after you've seen Paul - to have time to reflect on the experience as a group as well as individually, if you'd so wish.

Would you also check how early you can all make it to London, without it being prohibitively expensive? If we were able to meet in the morning and you finish meeting with Paul early afternoon, we might try and see if there's a matinee we could go en-masse to see (I think some start 2-3pm at latest) - with discussions and reflections as we go along..... Any other thoughts re-what we could do that day, appreciated.....
Good luck with the writing!....."

".....Hope you're all well and thriving and getting on with the rough drafts! Just to let you know - I got a succinct e-mail back from Paul Sirett re-my definition of 'rough draft' which said "Absolutely right!" - so please feel confident that all parties now share the same understanding of what this 'rough draft' may mean - and I doubt it'd hurt for you all to go and look again at that e-mail of mine....It's reassuring in those panicked gloomy moments (and you know what I mean....) to remember we're expecting a 'first stagger through from beginning to end' - and not an Olivier-winning script (yet). So please do the work, but also, please, be kind and good to yourselves - and give me a ring/e-mail should you require sympathetic noises or support or dramaturgical advice or a buddy to escape to Rio with....

Re-forthcoming workshops:

To confirm:

Tuesday 7th Aug - Soho Writer's Seminar Room
Writer, director and lecturer Sam Boardman-Jacobs. (Original writer on 'Brookside' and 12 years on 'The Archers')

10.40-ish - arrive, with coffee

11.00-12:00pm - Radio workshop led by me

12:00-1:00pm - lunch

1:00-4:00pm - Workshop led by Sam Boardman-Jacobs - Soaps, serials and team writing: storylining, creating Bibles, etc....

Members of Lin Coghlan's group - other writers on attachment with Soho will be joining the masterclass, as will Sarah from Writernet, we hope.

4:00-6:00pm-ish - drinks in the bar (?) but also me available for one-to-ones re-your rough draft theatre scripts.... I'm available until I have to run and catch the train at 7pm.... but please give me an indication nearing the time whether we need to meet or not...

Weds 22nd Aug - Workshop with Richard Shannon (*Director, developer of writers, Independent radio producer*)

2:00-5:00pm - Richard will be leading his masterclass, part of which will be giving feed-back on your opening pages of a radio play (please see below). I will be making myself available to meet with you individually before Richard's workshop for any last thoughts/talk re-the deadline for the rough draft. I haven't yet put a time for this - it will depend on your own requirements, so please let us talk nearer the time....

Deadline for rough draft of theatre script: 25 August

Deadline for radio play homework: 15 August (see below)

Radio Play Homework:

As you all know, the disPlay4 project is about the theatre commission, but also about developing you all as writers, so your work continues beyond the commission deadline.... We're very keen to have you in a strong position re-the BBC radio play bids for March 2002. As Jessica Dromgoole told us, as well as the outline for the proposed radio play, they also want (and always read) the first 10 pages of the actual script.... Hence my work on 'openings' but also the shape the workshop with Richard Shannon will take: as outlined to you before, I'm requesting that you write the beginning of a radio play - (the afternoon radio play slot, 2.15-3pm, daily) - but as you have a commitment to the rough draft, I'm suggesting the minimum is 2 pages (2-3 mins), maximum 10 pages. You'll find an

example of the correct way to lay-out a radio script in the hand-out Jessica gave you. I'm asking that you deliver these to me by e-mail by 15 August, so that I can get them to Richard to read in advance. He will then give much feed-back on these pages of script in his workshop with you the following week. This is a truly wonderful opportunity to have an experienced and creative professional producer advise you on your work ... seize it, I say! I know that the deadline for producing this is close, but with a minimum of 2 pages, I think you'll be able to manage! I'll also go into this in more detail on 7 Aug in our morning workshop.

Jamie - I know you'll miss the workshop on 22nd Aug, but I'd still ask you to do this, as Richard can still advise you on your radio script outside of the workshop, which I think is terrific!

Hope that's clear - and a great opportunity!
Any problems or thoughts, please do get back to me....."

Showcase

While the writers had been juggling the commitments of the three taught terms with working to the deadline of delivery of first draft, they were also becoming aware of the challenge of the showcase. No more than 60 minutes, they would have to consider carefully what choices to make in offering a showcase script for actors and director to realise....The aim was to run the showcase, then spend a further burst rewriting post-showcase before final script delivery.

As Project Director I had taken a six week sabbatical from my job at writernet, temporarily handing over the reins to my colleague Sarah Dickenson. Sarah worked incredibly hard to orchestrate the logistics, supported by Jenny at Graeae, particularly with casting, and Kaite who kept the writers together and on track. I rejoined the project temporarily as director of one of the pieces. Jenny directed another and 2 directors with new writing experience were brought in from outside London to reflect the fact that the writers were from different parts of the country. Actors were cast and a company of 27 spent 2 days work shopping, 1 day rehearsing and 2 days performing the 4 writers' pieces.

The showcase was a vital part of the project. It

- took place as part of the Soho Theatre Writers festival, placing the work in a professional central London new writing context, which allowed the work to speak for itself
- provided a model of integrated casting
- delivered fully accessible and signed staged readings
- was widely advertised in conjunction with writernet's professional development activities and the first Writers Expo.

All the writers agreed that this was a fantastic part of the learning process and worked furiously to reshape their plays for final first draft submission on December 12th.

disPlay4 showcase postcard.....

writernet, in partnership with Graeae and Soho Theatre and supported by the Arts Council of England and Belvedere Trust, present 4 showcase readings of newly commissioned plays by 4 disabled writers. The showcase marks the culmination of disPlay4, a pioneering cross media development programme.

Eff-Harry-Stow by Kerry Hood, directed by Jenny Sealey

This is me: C. H. Swan age thirteen and ninety-six months. Me and My Family, all smashed to bits.

Life Support by Jamie Beddard, directed by Jonathan Meth

Tom engineers a dangerous re-union amongst the ruins of his former 'special' school. Can Maria be finally laid to rest?

Looking for K by Danny Start, directed by Bill Hopkinson

'Lover? Model? Muse? Cherchez la Femme. Matt Galbraith is on the case...'

Like Mother by Angela McNab, directed by Dana Fainaru

'Am I supposed to be grateful now, generous earth mother? So generous you gave me away.'

The disPlay4 Dramaturg is Kaite O'Reilly

Readings will be held on Tuesday 20th and Wednesday 21st November at Soho Theatre between 11am and 4.30pm.

Tickets: £2 per reading or all four for £5. All four readings will be presented on both days.

11:00 - 11:15 Welcome and introduction
11:15 - 12:15 Life Support / Looking for K
12:30 - 1:30 Like Mother/ Eff-Harry-Stow
1:30 - 2:15 Lunch
2:15 - 3:15 Looking for K/ Life Support
3:30 - 4:30 Eff-Harry-Stow/ Like Mother

The opportunity to provide the 4 writers on the project with a showcase as part of the Soho Writers Festival at Soho Theatre presented the project with a big bonus, but also a number of additional costs, particularly as the project partners agreed that they wanted full accessibility and to adopt an integrated casting approach to the readings.

This marked the conclusion of their script writing part of the project. Dramaturg Kaite, myself and the writers then agreed a time to meet in January 2002 to reflect back on the process since March, including a focus on career development and what would happen next for the writers after the formal conclusion of the disPlay4 project. This featured information dissemination and discussion pertaining to both the new writing industry and disability issues.

From an employment point of view, we were able to attract literary managers from Birmingham Rep, Scarborough, Paines Plough and The Bush. Scarborough asked to see scripts of 2 of the plays, Graeae and Paines Plough were collaborating on a Wild Lunch programme of readings, Jamie was asked to oversee and contribute to this. London Arts were also keen to welcome applications for further development of the work they saw from the London based writer and actors....

From an advocacy point of view, the fact that the project was included in all the Soho Writers Festival publicity, over and above that produced specifically for the project, helped raise both the profile and the status of the work...

And periodically something would arise...." And a bit of advice: as you may know a literary manager from Scarborough expressed interest in seeing the first draft of Looking for K. I have sent her a copy - but where does this leave me re: my contract with writernet? Is showing other interested parties OK? The literary manager of the Everyman also wants a looksie. Can I? Should I? All the best to you and yours for chrimbo and new year. This year's been a cracker - thanks".

Disability Awareness

We decided early on that we didn't want to offer Disability Awareness training to project partners and writers at the beginning of the project, partly as we wanted the team to gel around writing and partly because we didn't want it to be too theoretical, we hoped it would emerge out of practice. By waiting until the project was well underway, we felt that the participants would gain much more.... In the event when we came to organise the training, the Disability Awareness Trainer was unwell and the logistics of bringing the dramaturg, writers, Soho theatre, Graeae and writernet together again proved impossible.

On reflection it is something I would now build in early as whatever might appear burdensome would be outweighed by the value of teasing out and airing the issues. And this is fundamental to a project which is seeking to develop disabled writers.

We got as far as asking the companies, for it was as much for them as the writers, what they hoped to get out of Disability Awareness training – this was to help shape what the trainer would have delivered.

Kaite: "I remember being challenged at the book launch of the Graeae anthology in Soho - how did I identify myself? Would I call myself a Disabled writer ? I explained it was hard to answer, as I am no longer technically disabled and am no longer registered disabled - but formerly disabled.... I then said I'd always avoided such classification in the past when people tried to pigeonhole me as a woman writer, an Irish writer, etc - as I wrote about more things than appropriate to my specific gender, race, sexual preference, etc - though when it served a purpose (aka Peeling) I'm very happy to play that card..... but I am all these things - and can understand someone being wary of being put into one category....

....It may be interesting to touch on issues about our possible identity as disabled practitioners - when do we use that label or not - how do we challenge the preconceptions the press, media, general public, etc, may have - how to handle that awful situation where we may be called to give a list of disabilities (I've experienced this a lot and I know Graeae have faced it with the shows, incl. Peeling - Caro's the deaf one, Soph uses a wheelchair, yada-yada...) How do we avoid the ghettoisation, the PC-ness, organisations 'using' us for funding or to tick boxes on equal opportunity forms, the tokenism...? Not sure how to present this, but I think this is the meat of some of our experiences (and source of contention, perhaps, for some)... labelling: how to deal with it, subvert it, take control and advantage of it, reject, etc, etc....?

Also, what cultural and political forums are there to get involved with? If this is more about culture and politics than ramps into buildings and issues of access, how can the richness and diversity of the disability 'scene' be accessed and introduced to these (sometimes faint-hearted) writers?"

Ruth: "I think I'll need a little longer to consider the implications of the disPlay4 project, but I'm interested in general in issues of representation and self-representation of disability, and in learning about the specific requirements, expectations and intentions of disabled theatre practitioners and audiences. I don't know if it's relevant, but I'd be keen to learn more about the development and production/tour of Peeling, as a possible model of good practice established by Graeae, but applicable to the future work of small companies like Soho...."

Reflection

We built in formal evaluation sessions at both writer and steering panel level midway through the project and again at its conclusion. But of course Kaite and I were frequently in discussion either by phone or email.

To formalise the process, Kaite and I went back to some of the original stimulus points we had heard from our meetings with Lin:

- Are we getting the balance between good and comfortable?
- Getting the plays out of the writers vs. developing the writers
- Providing a lifejacket for surviving: tangible, practical advice
- Seeing work as a group vs. the challenges posed by a non-London focus
- After the rough draft: enjoy exploring the story, new characters and the possibility of radical change.
- Exit strategy for disPlay4: what happens next?
- What about getting agents?
- How was the relationship to Soho Attachment programme developing?
- How was the meeting with Paul at Soho?
- How would the showcase as part of the Soho Writers Festival work?

We discussed the possibility of extending the project's length with additional resources to achieve our objectives and avoid conflict between the taught TV development and delivery of the theatre commission.

We set the writers a questionnaire to help shape their thoughts.

Phase 1 feedback

Some questions for disPlay4 writers, looking back on the project, to inform the discussion at the meeting on Tuesday 22nd:

This is offered by way of a stimulus: you need not follow it if you would prefer another format.

However, I would like your responses to be written up by the end of January – giving you time to modify and reshape, if you want to, after we meet.....

1. The showcasing process

- The process with your director outside the rehearsal room. Any questions or comments?
- The process with the director and performers inside the rehearsal room?
- The process with the dramaturg prior, during and after the showcase?
- What became clear about your script which you weren't conscious of before, in rehearsal?
- What became clear about your script which you weren't conscious of before, in performance before an audience?
- What would you do differently, if anything?

2. You, the writer

- What have you learned about yourself as a writer working:

to a deadline; alone; as a collaborator with director/actors; with a dramaturg/tutor; in a group/small community of other writers?

- Where are you now as a writer?
- Has the process armed you with more skills/ experiences/ knowledge/ contacts?
- How do you perceive 'the industry'?
- Do you feel you understand more how certain processes may run such as: working to deadlines in commissions; working towards a showing of rehearsed work; in the business generally (a la our talks from professionals in the industry).

3. The disPlay4 project

- Things you'd like more of?
- Things you found useful or instructive?
- Things you would have liked to add or subtract from the program/experience?
- Things you'd like to do now?
- What advice would you give writernet/Graeae/Soho if they were about to embark on a similar project again?
- What would you change, develop, cut, keep?
- How did the project's attempt to balance learning and working operate for you?
- How did you manage to make ends meet during the project?
- How did your work on the first draft commission stage play develop in relation to the radio, television and theatre strands of Development?
- How did the face to face sessions work for you: visiting speakers/ group with the dramaturg/ one-to-one with the dramaturg?
- How did the dramaturgical communication support between sessions work for you?
- How did the recruitment process work for you?
- How did you feel about the involvement in the project of the three partners? (writernet, Graeae and Soho Theatre). Was it clear? What would you have liked that didn't happen; or preferred not to have happened?

1. The showcasing process

"I would like more time before meeting at the workshop/rehearsal – a period in which to 'touch base', to understand the director's vision and intentions. I understand this may be impractical, taking into consideration other commitments. I just think to go in cold as it were, is daunting and (in my experience) doesn't necessarily reflect the 'real' process. In terms of what I would do differently: I would give the actor and director synopses so they are more prepared and able to short-cut basic discussions on motivation, character, plot, action and so on. This could be particularly useful given the lack of rehearsal time. It is something I have done before, and the actors found it really helpful".

"The most useful was definitely the showcase. I think I learnt more - about the craft, about direction and acting and structure - than in any other part of the year"

"Everyone I worked with was supportive of the work and the process of writing - I was made to feel part of a world I hadn't experienced before.

To be honest, I feared being left in a corner watching it all unfold, but Kaite, Bill and the actors never let that happen and helped me produce some of the best work I've done in ages".

"Funnily enough, I felt comfortable not saying much and listening. Maybe this is lack of experience deferring to someone with much more. But I never felt as if I needed to say anything - listening and absorbing seemed to work for me, and was what I needed to make sense of the work".

"I feel I was very lucky with Dana Fainaru as she contacted me by email and phone several times before I met her. Despite her busy schedule she had read the script thoroughly and gave me useful feedback before we even met. I felt she was very committed and I learnt a lot from her. Dana created an environment where the performers could give their opinion on the script and I was pleased that not only were they keen to do so but they did it in a sensitive and informative way. I only have the highest praise for the never ending support that Kaite gave each of us and her total professionalism under pressure. I remember speaking with Danny after one of the rehearsals and we were both amazed and impressed with her in depth knowledge of our scripts - her memory capacity was scary. I thought that the 2nd Act was better than the 1st until I saw the strength and dramatic effect the 1st Act had on the audience. I then realised that my second act was a completely different play and would have to be completely re-written".

2. You, the writer

"It confirmed to myself that I do have the discipline to keep the ball rolling up the hill. To have outlets - to see those friends when it's all getting hectic, to watch a film or take the dog for a walk - to allow oneself to walk away. I enjoyed the camaraderie - although because of us coming from all over the country this tended to happen a lot by email. All good people and writers from whom I learned a lot. But most of all - more confidence. Most of all the confidence to be myself".

"I have learned that I enjoy supporting, and the support of, other writers. In particular, I felt a sense of involvement and achievement when asked for advice, inspiration or reassurance (e-mail/telephone contact). This has consolidated my plan to teach/lecture as part of my career.

The process has armed me with more contacts and experiences, namely: the showcase yielded interest in my work. The names of Soho Theatre and writernet opened doors. I sent flyers with my writing biography to literary managers, agents and production companies and had a very positive response, which is on-going.

I don't perceive 'the industry' in a radically different light. I still find it daunting! Yet my confidence as a writer has grown to the extent that I

can view 'the industry' as a positive challenge i.e. "these people don't know about me...but they ought to...and I'm the only one who can tell them."

The commission-deadline process has run along the same lines as my work for Paines Plough. My play for Bristol Old Vic was less pressurised and I had more freedom to communicate my strong vision, which, to be honest, is more ideal (and, I acknowledge, not always possible)".

3. The disPlay4 project

"The workshops were, in general useful and instructive, especially sessions led by Kaite (namely: step outlines; key structures used in the industry). Also, the BBC talk by Jessica Dromgoole was really informative. More industry professional sessions would be a good idea eg radio/TV producer; literary manager".

"I am now of the opinion that it's a far smaller world - getting one's foot in the door is the hardest part".

"I would add a session on 'professional' skills and services eg contracts, copyright, agents. (Also, following on from Sarah's point, advice on exploiting the potential of the Internet for research, contacts and so on would be very useful. My writernet bulletin is a great starting-point for directing me towards relevant sites.)"

"I would like to see more vigorous practical writing sessions - I truly believe that every writer is vivified by short, sharp creative bursts in the form of automatic writing - streams that open up a scene, location, character etc. Carrying out these exercises in the presence of other writers brings focus and discipline to the creative soul. (I do understand that some writers have difficulty using hands/keyboard in this way. Maybe there are opportunities for finding and accessing alternative modes of communicating ideas.)"

"Dramaturgical process: Kaite's input regarding the play - structure, length, staging - was useful, committed and encouraging. Between sessions, there was regular contact by e-mail or telephone".

"Three partners: writernet has been the guiding hand during the programme. Graeae have been involved to the extent that Jenny Sealey directed my piece. Soho Theatre hasn't, for me, been part of the project and it would have been great to feel a part of the life of the place. Paul Sirett was really encouraging in our 'pitch' meeting (with Jenny Sealey) and his one-to-one advice was focussed and knowledgeable. Jo Ingham has been a friendly point of contact and information".

" I cannot praise Kaite highly enough. She managed to get the balance right between professionalism, support and kindness. Kaite kept her promises (sometimes too faithfully – as I sometimes hadn't moved on as much as I would have liked) to call us and was in constant contact by email. I felt supported at all times".

"The disPlay4 programme is a fantastic opportunity for new writers to gain a foothold and to join a community of like-minded professionals. The information provided by writernet on disability resources is comprehensive and proactive. Jonathan and Sarah are genuinely committed to new writing and their support has been invaluable. Without their generosity, I would have found it difficult to buy this computer. The contribution was unasked for but given freely and their belief in me – in my potential and in my own commitment to writing – translated into practical help, is worth more than I can say".

4. Employment

One writer was holding down a full time paid job at a disability organisation. He requested unpaid leave in order to attend the sessions which dramaturg Kaite O'Reilly was running and, ironically, his employers proved rather difficult. This seemed to be largely because of internal politics. A new regime had recently taken over at board level and they were still to appoint a chief exec. Kaite, Jenny and I all wrote letters of support, but they dragged their feet and took a month to notify the writer that the matter was to go to a personnel review meeting. Legally there was probably little room for argument - depending on the writer's terms and conditions - but this attitude towards individual professional development was disappointing. Especially as the employer was an organisation with a disability focus. Kaite, Jenny and I did not receive replies to our letters.

Meantime the writer was getting more and more frustrated and this was not helping him to focus on his work. He had been working hard, but this was exactly the sort of inflexibility which can contribute to melancholy and depression. In the event the writer resolved the situation by finding full time employment elsewhere, with another more flexible disability organisation.

Feeding back to the question: what advice would you give writernet/Graeae/Soho if they were about to embark on a similar project again? One writer suggested: "Possibly take into consideration those who are working (full time) as they may not be as flexible as those who aren't. This did not affect the dynamic of the group and did not affect me personally but I know one member had these difficulties".

The writer in question said: "I was given a lot of support when my employers refused to allow the time off to take part. But, given my experiences, which were energy consuming and traumatic, maybe a similar project could plan for such circumstances - I was lucky to find another job, I would hate it if a talented writer lost his/her job or the opportunity to participate because of shortsighted (sic) and unreasonable behaviour on behalf of an employer. How to do this? Well..."

5. Personal Reflections

Clarity of project focus and primary success criteria, coupled with flexibility of delivery is my major personal sense of learning. Prepare, but prepare to unprepare...

What does this mean? The scheduling of activity has to be fluid for a variety of reasons. Most obviously to respond to the needs of those writers whose health was unpredictable, but also because what may have an impact in theory doesn't actually in practice, until the writer is confronted with it in a meaningful way.

One of our writers has cerebral palsy and we are still grappling with the technological challenge of how to enable this writer to avoid the arduousness of typing work into a computer at a speed determined by the willingness of his hands to follow the plot... This is crucial to a writer as if you are hampered in approximating your speed of thought by the mechanics of reproducing data this is very detrimental to the creative realisation of a script. Adaptive keyboards help, but only a little. Voice recognition software is based on probability models and the writers' cerebral palsy renders this option rather risible. The writer is now experimenting with a personal note taker, but I suspect we will not find the ideal solution for a while, if ever. These basic functional issues are often major impediments. In practice what we have had to do from a management point of view is recognise that this will create time constraints, so that for this writer project milestone deadlines may need extending. The writer in question has an only partly-justified reputation as a seat-of-the-pants, last minute merchant. Is this just the writer's creative disposition or is it actually the result of years of having to deal with technology that will not meet his needs?

Employment

For Damien and The Employment Team at ACE, disPlay4 was also a new departure. Instead of supporting individual Apprenticeships for disabled Arts Administrators, here was a readymade project which would support 4 disabled artists.

While the content and processes of the project focused on the art and craft of playwriting, writernet has always had an avowed commitment to writers' career development and all the attendant issues that go with. So we found opportunities to feed in intelligence around employment matters, for example the **ACE Good Practice Disability Handbook**. In practice of course, until these issues stop being theoretical and start being lived they don't tend to come into the forefront of a writers' consciousness. What was unique about this project was that by tracking the four writers beyond the end of the first phase, this created a timescale of over 18 months. And of course this means that Employment issues become lived....

"Aarrrrggh. Thought I should register as self-employed, so phoned the Tax Office. They quoted 'penalties' and 'failure to pay NI' in tones of increasing doom. I explained about my first Writernet contract (May 2001) and how I thought I was going to be a one-off and therefore I didn't register, that I am enquiring now as I am over the threshold for this year etc. I also pleaded the fact I am girly and innumerate. She blathered on. I begged. She said 'get a pamphlet. Either way you're paying a fine'. Aargggh. Will there be any time at our October meeting to talk about such things?"

Phase 2

Following the success of the first phase The ACE Employment Team offered the project a second grant to further develop the work. This was a fantastic opportunity to extend the writers experience and contacts in to other media and back them to continue developing their work as writers. In some cases this was to further develop existing drafts, but in others where the writer had needed to write through a particular piece, they were ready to move on to other projects they had in development.

We agreed with the writers to focus as follows:

1. Employment: a session in London for the writers, Kaite, and Jonathan on all matters relating to disability and employment. While the focus will be on disability and employment, Kaite's involvement will help us to keep bringing it back to the specific and varied needs of working dramatists.
2. Script development, with Kaite O'Reilly as dramaturg, as agreed per your outlines.
3. Career development. Advice from writernet to be delivered individually through discussion with you on a range of career matters, such as agents, literary managers, protocols, etc.
4. Disability awareness training. As part of the exit strategy from the project all writers and the three project partners will come together with an outside input for some training and discussion. This will be a half day session in London.
5. Project Report. Responses to and engagement with Jonathan Meth's drafting, to enable publication for wider distribution.
6. Agreement to work with writernet should the Arts Council's employment unit want one piece to reprise showcase.
7. Attendance at a final evaluation meeting.

Sample notes on Career Development

As part of the second phase writernet held structured conversations resulting in action points for the writer.

1. Writing support

One-to-one support is working well, especially when getting stuff out of Jamie's head. Important that Jamie knows and feels comfortable with person. 1 hour on and then 1 hour for Jamie to rewrite is what is currently working well. Writernet will pay access worker rates for this support. Jamie to advise on who and when.

2. Time management

2.1 Jamie to obtain Nokia diary as part of drive to more pro-active time management.

2.2 Jamie to liase with Jenny re: Graeae time & disPlay4 time over the next 3 months.

2.3 Jamie's observation that he works effectively in the Graeae office needs to be carried over so that one of the goals of this second phase is for Jamie to successfully create a working environment at home that will enable him to work effectively.

2.4 Jamie aware that writers do deals with themselves around what they need to achieve on any writing working day. Distractions will always be there, but if the deal is done then the rewards will sometimes be forthcoming...

2.5 Listen to more radio plays; make a regular time to do this (domestic chores?).

2.6 Moving beyond great improvisation to greater structure.

3. What do I need to know?

3.1 Jamie knows enough about the business to know that he can get an answer to a problem as and when it emerges, so that natural curiosity can be channelled elsewhere, aka don't research the world.

3.2 Natural nosiness can then be channelled inwards, drawing on Jamie's experience as actor and director to move between points of view in exploring this curiosity, eg writer with eagle eye overview, actor as interior view of individual characters and director as looking sideways,

moving around the action; and between the points of view of actor and writer. Jamie can use these skills to role play in pursuit of his writing work.

3.3 in touch with writers

writers' talks, masterclasses, workshops and events: Jamie to access mailing lists of Soho, Hampstead, Royal Court, Bush etc, but also Rocliffe Forum, Caird Company etc. Check writernet site and bulletin.

3.4 Sarah to provide list of key sites for Jamie to explore scripts deconstructed.

4. This is part of an ongoing conversation...

Production

We were the victims of our own success. When we began the project we hoped that at least one produceable script would emerge. What we didn't anticipate was that the Artistic Directors of the two producing partners would both want to direct the play. What began life as Kerry Hood's play Eff Harry Stow, became Meeting Myself Coming Back. Different options were explored, as best demonstrated by Jenny's email to Abigail Morris, Artistic Director at Soho Theatre

"Dear Abigail. It was good to meet the other day. Here is the nuts and bolts of our discussion.

1. Graeae could do a Soho/Graeae co- production if Jenny directs.
2. Soho could do the play in house. Abigail directs. Either way the play wins.
3. A Graeae/Soho co-production the ideal accumulation of display 4 collaboration.
4. Soho in house means it taking on disabled writers for productions.

We agreed that both organisations would benefit hugely from working together.

1. Profile.
2. New accessible ways of working artistically.
3. Demystifying disability.
4. Expertise of working with writers.
5. Bringing together our audiences.
6. Graeae touring package.

The final part of the discussion was as follows:

1. Abigail to see if play can be programmed June 2002 and to let Roger at Graeae know week of 21st Jan.
2. Jenny to availability check Jenny (actor) and Jeni (interpreter).
3. Abigail and Jenny to work through the text / discuss vision etc ways of working with the writer etc week of 18th Feb.
4. Jenny to lead first 3 weeks of rehearsals. Abigail joins week 4. Abigail to do take major role in working with the writer prior to rehearsal.
5. Soho to work quickly with Graeae so they can start booking a tour. Edinburgh was discussed, but maybe too late??

Abigail. That is basically how we left it. I have not heard from Jenny actor yet. I will let you know a.s.a.p. If this is going to happen, Graeae will need to move fast to book a tour. Can you talk to Mark and get back to me and Roger. Sorry if it feels rushed...that is a touring theatre company nightmare and venues are programmed so far in advance.

You take care. Let me know if I have left things out etc. Love Jenny xx"

The aesthetics of the play, the politics surrounding disability and the relationship between producing company and writer proved complex areas, with differing views held by the writer, Graeae and Soho Theatre.

The decision to move quickly to production, coinciding with the departure for the RSC of Literary Manager Paul Sirett, who had been involved with disPlay4 as a steering panel member, meant that some of these differences were not afforded the time and resources to be properly resolved. As often happens in theatre, once the decision to produce had been taken, almost everything else became subservient to getting the play on.

In the event there was to be no co-production, Soho Theatre produced the play, but not with Abigail Morris directing. Instead John Wright was brought in.

Kerry's (re)view

Meeting Myself Coming Back

ran at Soho Theatre from 18th July – 17th August 2002

"The poet Craig Raine famously captured the strangeness of everyday objects in *A Martian Sends a Postcard Home*. Kerry Hood achieves the same effect...The value of the piece is the insight that it gives into the half-life led by the semi-institutionalised...Here, there is something to be both seen and heard." *The Sunday Times*

"Hood says something enormous: that life is there for the living." *The Guardian*

"Beautifully written...Hood's script is often demanding...slick, shocking, frequently funny and very moving." *Metro*

"Painful, witty...What marks out Hood's new drama is its feel for the serpentine twists and turns of language's ironies..." *Evening Standard*

"Imagine one of Beckett's no-hopers clambering out of her sack, dustbin or urn and letting language gamely rip..." *The Times*

"Hood clearly has a distinctive voice of her own..." *The Stage*

"This is a fresh, vibrant play with the ability to move and amuse and is strongly recommended." *British Theatre Guide*

"Breathtaking...emotionally wrenching and ultimately devastating, Hood's incredibly powerful play rewards effort on all fronts." *Watsonstage.com*

"Like her creation Catherine, Hood has an unusual and incredibly compelling dramatic voice; let's hope it's a long time before she stops using it." *What's On In London*

"An exhausting, but thoroughly worthwhile work." *TNT Magazine*

"Hood expertly intertwines humour and pathos...deserves a West End transfer." *Theatreworld*

Jamie's view

Phase 2 Feedback

"The disPlay4 extension has been invaluable in that it has allowed time to 'get back to basics', and focus upon the areas of my writing in greatest need of improvement. Under the inspiring guidance of Kaite O'Reilly, we have pinpointed the problems, and limitations that had come up during the initial disPlay4 scheme, and through a series of exercises, conversations, selected readings and research that set about plugging the gaps. It was agreed that process, rather than product should be central, as the deliverance of a first draft would merely replicate my bad habits, and deter from the in-depth 'brick building' process that I have constantly shied away from.

Also, no burgeoning ideas/themes to the fore, and I felt it important to look at ways of creating new materials, characters and storylines. Being devoid of stories was obviously disheartening, and to be shown the ways and means of producing potential sources of inspiration has been invaluable in terms of confidence, and introduced a 'writer's eye' to day-to-day activities. Whilst some of the methods may appear commonsense, it has nevertheless been incredibly useful to have these techniques spelt out.

General reading of newspapers/journals/magazines, and watching news/documentaries uncovered, and concentrated the mind on many issues, subject matters and stories. It was refreshing to look at all these materials without any preconceived notions, and open oneself to the infinite possibilities, before being channelled down one particular path. Previously, most of my ideas have been desperately mined from inside, so it was exciting to deliberately search for stimuli from a plethora of sources; reading Sunday papers, or becoming immersed in an obscure documentaries without feeling guilty were satisfying by-products. The notions of enjoying research, and allowing oneself to be open to the possibilities of all influences was very liberating. The range of stimuli could vary enormously; a striking billboard image, a newspaper headline, a snippet of conversations, a piece of music, a television image, an evocative sound or view, and so on. Similarly, everyday observations aided the search for interesting, and challenging characters; weddings, holidays, etc. All these techniques should be obvious to the writer, but to have the time and space to wallow in this open research was very gratifying, and taught important lessons in the endless possibilities in the creation of materials.

From this research, I created a scrapbook into which anything of any interest was placed, and which can be used as an archive of ideas. This has been particularly useful due to my inability to jot down notes, and goes some way to establishing systemization to my chaotic working practices. Throughout disPlay4 these problems – some practical, and some self-inflicted – have hindered my creative process, and by adopting a ‘skeletal’ approach (structure, before substance) I am beginning to address them more fully.

Common themes and threads presented themselves amongst the garnered materials; connections between the diverse resources could be made. For instance, the images of careless freedom evoked by the vast open plains of a Marlboro’ billboard, juxtaposed with the Woomera dustbowl housing Australia’s most fearsome detention centre; the contradictions, aspirations and themes implicit in these two stark places sourced immediate interest, and springboards for further research. Once the process is underway other random triggers start providing strands, and the jigsaw is begun.

Once the areas of interest had been pinpointed, I did much reading around the subject, and for the first time used the Internet to its full capability. Shifting through the numerous articles, personal testimonies and research documents opened many story lining, and thematic possibilities. Also, the topicality, and newsworthiness of Australian immigration policies could be tracked, with new stories coming to light daily. The main problem is when to stop the research, and begin coalescing, and shaping into potential dramatic action; separating the wheat, from the chaff.

Along with the artistic manipulation came the familiar headaches and blockages, and Kaite provided exercises to overcome these. ‘Knowing your character’ and allowing them to determine plot, is a tenet I have seldom subscribed too in previous writing; all elements have been clumsily tacked together, rather than effortlessly dovetailed. Through exercises such as ‘the chronological breakdown’ I have begun to realize how the fabric may be woven, and appear seamless; realization, and achievement remain distant bedfellows! Looking at the cultural, socio-economic, and historical influences brought to bear on characters brings them to life, as well as adding authenticity, and dimension to story. Motivations, and behaviour naturally emerge, and characterizations become believable.

So, in conclusion the subsidiary of disPlay4 has enabled me to apply a greater science, and organization to my writing, and provided a firmer bedrock on which to place artistic whim. Undoubtedly, I feel more confident to enter the marketplace, and pursue my ambitions; for which I am eternally grateful for the opportunities afforded by disPlay4, and in particular the promptings of Kaite”.

Additional learning points

These are drawn from two final meetings and are offered as a way of engaging with what we might have done better.

Final writers feedback session

Does an equal partnership mean equal involvement?

The attempts to do more things with the Attached Writers group at Soho Theatre didn't happen. This was partly owing to logistics, scheduling, the need to develop safe spaces for each group and the fact that Lin was very busy. But this did translate into a feeling that the disPlay4 writers were not really part of the wider culture. The writers felt well supported by Jo and Ann, but felt that Senior Management, though excited by the showcase, needed to own the partnership: as issues around STC's engagement with disability were not clear.

The writers were also not clear what Graeae wanted from the project and what Jenny's role would be (apart from strong involvement in the showcase). This suggested the need for further dialogue between STC and Graeae around any future collaboration, sharing ideas and perspectives.

What happened with BBC and Channel 4? Writers had enough work to take up their time in Phase 1, but in Phase 2? Despite meetings with 5 different personnel at Channel 4, it was not possible to secure brokerage for any attachments with interested producing companies. Once Kate Valentine had moved on from the Exchange Project at BBC Radio, this connection broke down. On the other hand the session that Jessica Dromgoole ran as invited speaker from the BBC New Writing Initiative was felt to be very valuable. This was the pragmatic way forward.

The relationship between the commission and learning aspect of the project was a complicated one. Developing writers both *as writers* and through their scripts was laudable, but who were the writers writing for? Paul and Jenny and Kaite? Was it a Graeae script, Soho script, neither, both? This led to a muddying of waters. There needed to be better steering when the scripts were delivered: clear objectives relating to potential production outcomes.

The pressure points between learning and employment aspects were also acutely felt when the project found that both Graeae and Soho wanted to produce Kerry's play. Clear guidelines as to what would happen should have been drawn up and agreed at the start. Companies need to work issues out and not involve the writer. There needed to be clarification on

the level of involvement that a writer can have once the green light for production has been agreed.

Final steering panel session

What did the project partners learn?

I asked the panel to consider the following to shape their thoughts:

1. Project Objectives: Have they been met?
2. Relationship between employment and learning. How well did this work? What were the difficult bits? How were they dealt with?
3. Project partnership. Reflections on roles and responsibilities of Soho Theatre, Graeae, Writernet.
4. Beyond the project: BBC and Channel 4.
5. Communication: between the partners, with the writers, to the outside world.
6. Showcase readings.
7. Phase 2: how was the time used? What could be built in to any future model?
8. Moving towards Production: what can usefully be learnt from the experience?
9. Future Plans.

Jenny Sealey

Most projects stop as soon as the showcase reading has taken place. What made disPlay4 unique is the amount of investment in the writers beyond the showcase presentation. Jenny wanted to place writers' material with other companies, for example Angela with Red Ladder, Danny with Circus Space. Jenny liked the pitching session, where she sat with Paul while the writers pitched their script ideas, as she felt she learned a lot from Paul. As part of her learning curve for Graeae – how to facilitate more than one writer. She is aware that she didn't create the opportunity to talk to the writers about Graeae and her work. She has learnt from this and put it to good use on the Paines Plough collaboration on Wild Lunch. Peter Wolf (the writer who came through the Disabled Writers Mentoring Scheme) was open and Jenny has enjoyed good working relationships with both him and Kaite.

When Jenny is offered as a director, disabled writers don't want to necessarily be part of Graeae. There is a need to remove pressure to find one solution, one outcome. Glyn Cannon is a non-disabled writer and Graeae have the option of a co-production with Paines Plough. There are implications around the aesthetics and politics of Graeae – ways to grow the company and engage the mainstream may be around combining different permutations of disabled and non-disabled practitioners. This is not an exclusively disability issue – it is partly about aesthetics, partly about the status of the director – it happens all the way up to the National Theatre. To have a success like Peeling (Graeae produced Kaite O'Reilly's play at Soho Theatre in April 2002 during Phase 2 of disPlay4) is proof that the work has a place in mainstream culture – so that in turn can become a stronger focus / attraction for writers. Collaboration with Unicorn has been very different. Mike Kenny (non-disabled writer) was commissioned, with an attachment for Anu Kumar (disabled writer) with Carl Miller (non disabled) as dramaturg. Graeae are now trying different models of working...

Paul Sirett

Paul had a very clear objective – that disPlay4 be a stepping stone to bringing writers into the theatrical mainstream – so that writers would be confident to be out there in the world. Paul wanted writers to escape from a ghetto mentality. They were now in a position to understand what is required of them, what it is really like. He was very pleased about getting one of the plays on and personally felt the project has been very successful. Kaite's wonderful ability to protect and yet be brutal when necessary was exemplary – he could not heap enough praise on her. Seeing Kaite's play at Soho also gave further context to the work of the project.

When the project issued agreements it should have stipulated who would be directing the readings and that any resulting production would be directed by Jenny. "I will direct your play if I like it" is the rule of thumb – as it is for the rest of the profession. Paul felt the project should be driven by Graeae, rather than being looked after by writernet. In the future Graeae needs to secure funds to appoint a Literary Associate to put together a coherent strategy – a whole structure of activity, drawing on the models of collaboration with Unicorn. Companies like Soho should act as host, but everyone should be clear that Graeae is driving it. Avoiding the specific issues around ownership of Kerry's play, when there is a good play, there is always a fight . Paul was happy to draw up plans for how Graeae could work with a Literary Associate and apprentice Literary Assistant.

Damien Robinson

It was a fascinating process for Damien. Usually she funded a one person model of apprenticeship. While artists are offered individual bursaries, creativity and employment are almost always seen as two separate boxes. As an artist you need to understand the world of work, personal development – this approach can mean the difference between being seen as professional or as token. She viewed the project as absolutely worthwhile. She felt ownership and pride and would like ACE to develop models like it. Damien has enjoyed having little to do, but sit back and watch. She was pleased, also, that we were exploring what we could have done better: as how can we learn other than from our mistakes? Damien suggested the need to write in the principle of taking unpaid leave, and at interview stage underline that this must be negotiated by each writer with their employer as a precondition of entry on to the programme. Looking forward Damien explained that from Spring 2003 there would be a new unit at ACE - Resource Development – with responsibility for partnership, collaboration and capacity building. In practice the future of her work was unknown, but she remains committed to the field.

Why the project mattered

Since Kaite was at the heart of this project I asked her for some final thoughts...

"5 people (including me) are now part of a strong community of writers, all of them are in a very different place. Anniversary Waltz will be on at Scarborough then touring to Filey. Angela and Danny are both writing sample scripts for Doctors; also both contributing to the National Disability Arts Forum book. Danny's involved with flip the script at Manchester Contact and he's also being interviewed by Red Ladder/Half Moon YPT. Jamie is consolidating his work at Graeae and writing a forum theatre piece. Kerry has her agent, has got a bursary, is filling the stock cupboards. Meeting Myself Coming Back was submitted to the Meyer Whitworth / John Whiting awards and Alan Ayckbourn is directing her next piece. She's got funding to write from the Peggy Ramsay Foundation, plus she's been invited to do a week long workshop with Jack Bradley and Moira Buffini at the National Theatre Studio - and John Wright, who directed Meeting Myself Coming Back, wants to direct her next play, which she hasn't written yet, but he liked the synopsis....

Everybody's careers have improved.

Disability issues are more on the agenda; there is an emerging disability discourse; not in the ghetto any more. You can be a disabled writer not necessarily writing about disability. This sends a positive message.

The second phase was very important, after the first phase looking at shortfalls and where we hadn't been clear about things – we were able to remedy some of them. It was much less concrete outcome driven; the writers were empowered to drive the process and set the agenda. It was specifically tailor made for each writer according to where they were so:

one had a steady stream,
one wanted nothing then crashed and needed lots,
another was sick, so disability issues arose,
one had to stop and just rethink.

You do the learning and then the penny drops after: the second phase allowed time for pennies to drop – a decompression period: time for reflection is where real learning happens.

writernet, through careful and creative management, have transformed what could have been an interesting but ultimately limited project into one which has longevity and changes lives. The care invested into every element of the project has paid back in dividends. It is rare, in my

experience, to have such commitment to a project and such clear vision to create opportunities for learning, but also for employment. Thanks to writernet the writers I have worked with have gained immense confidence and knowledge of the industry. They are self-sufficient, informed and empowered both as writers and as individuals. My own knowledge and understanding of every element of the profession has been hugely widened since working as Jonathan and Sarah's colleague. Their contribution to the success of the project should be affirmed and highlighted, for without writernet the project and writers would never have achieved the heights we now celebrate".

Coda

This is a two part coda:

You will have read accounts from Danny and Jamie and critical responses to Kerry as part of this report. There is not a heading entitled "Angela". Her voice is sewn in elsewhere in this document, but the absence of a heading with her name on it is indicative of her enforced absence from some of the project: especially the second phase, through illness. Her presence was felt, however, at all times, through her encouragement of others and determination to complete her work despite the challenges posed by her health....

Final word from Kerry:

"I'm looking forward to seeing everyone. The last one I saw was Jamie at my play - and he'll soon be too famous to even look at me! (I keep seeing his mush on those trailers for the BBC series 'What's Your Problem?') Had a good - quick, half hour! - meeting with Ginny at Micheline Steinberg. They love my five planned projects. I explained my aim to earn some 'bread-and-butter', so she's going to target *Doctors*, *Holby City*, *Westway* etc and will try to get *Meeting Myself Coming Back* serialised on *Woman's Hour*. She's drawing up a contract for me to approve...."

For further information about this publication or writernet services please contact the office:

writernet
Cabin V
Clarendon Buildings
25 Horsell Road
Highbury
London
N5 1XL

Tel: 020 7609 7474 Fax: 020 7609 7557

Email: writernet@btinternet.com

Web: www.writernet.org.uk