

# Case Study

## Chichester Festival Theatre

### Back to School

**Back to School** is an inter-generational project which worked with three local care homes and members of our Youth Theatre, led by Community Partnerships Manager Louise Rigglesford.

The project aimed to bridge the gap between generations. A team of eight interviewers from the Youth Theatre (CFYT) delved into the past with older members of the local community who reflected on their school days. They gathered and recorded short video memories, culminating in a 10-minute film.

**How did it aim to reach or have relevance to older audiences? What impact did you want it to have on the size or profile of your visitor base?**

Chichester Festival Theatre believes that people of any age deserve their own opportunities to take part in cultural activities. The organisation is committed to exploring what it can offer people who may not find it easy to come to the Theatre to watch a performance in the usual way, but still want to get involved in our work.



CFT's Festival 2017 season opened in April with Alan Bennett's [\*Forty Years On\*](#), a play set in public school on the South Downs in 1968. The central character was a retiring head teacher played by Richard Wilson, and the play looked at themes of nostalgia, the impact of the past on the present, and the school experience.

The show provided the impetus for CFYT members to interview older members of the local community and invite them to reflect on their school days. The younger participants were offered training in interview styles, ensuring they listened actively, asked additional questions and encouraged the interviewees to reminisce and speak freely.

These conversations were filmed and screened at CFT. The film is also available on our YouTube channel, and the project will be featured in an article in theatre programmes in September/October 2017.

*'We went to the screening with some participants and had a great time. We were all really impressed with the film.'* **Representative from Augusta Court on the Back to School project**

### What tools did you use to measure this impact? What key indicator did you use to measure this impact?

We gathered nearly three hours of footage, from which the 10-minute video was created. The eight young people were really keen to hear about the older people's experiences, and the 21 older people were eager to share their past and their history. All aspects of school life, from uniforms to discipline, were discussed, with plenty of laughter involved.

The participants on both sides indicated their enjoyment of the process and were very willing to take part in future projects. The project has opened up dialogue with the three care homes and offered further opportunities to work together.

Around 100 people attended the screenings of the video at CFT. The videos were also shared with the care homes and within our email newsletters reaching over 50,000 people. The programme article will be read by over 7,000 people later this year.

### What other objectives were you hoping to achieve?

Our objective was to bring different generations and community groups together through a shared understanding of similar but not identical experiences.



We hoped this project would open doors with local care homes; we are very pleased with the reaction from the participants and also the organisations who are keen to continue the relationship.

We also intended that the experience would be beneficial for the younger interviewers who not only learned a new skill but also opened a dialogue with a different generation on a shared topic.

### **Were there opportunities for this activity to be intergenerational?**

Absolutely – that was the key intention and we have lots of plans for the future!

### **What worked well, what challenges did you face?**

The older participants found the opportunity of speaking with young people valuable. It was an opportunity to give voice to their own memories, sometimes revealing aspects they themselves hadn't thought or spoken of for some time. This benefitted everyone and created a really open dialogue.

One of the challenges was making it clear to the care homes that this project was open to all residents and didn't exclude anyone, whether they had dementia, physical disabilities or speech impediments. As a result, we worked with a Dementia Care Specialist setting.

### **What have been the most important things you have learned?**

This project was eagerly taken up by the care homes and we now know that this sort of initiative is incredibly popular and impactful on all those who took part.

### **What will you do differently next time?**

From feedback and observation, we recognise that the format was too focussed on asking the older members questions about their experiences. Next time, we would like to encourage the older participants to ask more questions of the younger members, creating further dialogue and making it more conversational rather than a one-way interview.

*'We want to thank you for all the wonderful times we have had: at CFT, at the Hub, in Steven Pimlott, and the marvellous singing sessions at St Paul's. We loved every second of it. What you do is very special, and so valuable in keeping the brain cells going. My husband definitely benefited from all the activities, as did I.'* **Dementia-Friendly Participant**

See more on our [YouTube channel](#).

#### Top Tips for engaging older audiences:

- Use relevant shows, events or classes as a springboard for in-depth engagement
- Offer a range of ways to get involved through practical workshops, volunteering opportunities and events
- Don't neglect traditional communication methods such as leaflets and paper surveys; not everyone is digitally active

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