



Streetwise Opera Methodology

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1 Mission, Aims and Core Values

Mission Statement

Streetwise Opera uses music to help people who have experienced homelessness make positive changes in their lives

Aims

To improve well-being and decrease social exclusion for people who have experienced homelessness

Core Values

Ambition

We are ambitious in what we do and have high expectations for ourselves and our work, and have led the way with practice and thinking in our field. We relish the opportunity to think differently and aspire for ourselves and those we work with, aiming to create a strong and flourishing organisation.

Integrity

We are very clear about what matters to us as a team and as individuals, and hold that very true. We have a very strong sense of our self-beliefs and are committed to the work that we do. Our approach is one that empowers others, and respectful of ourselves and others.

Collaboration

We are a strong loyal team, and enjoy the support and energy that working together. Our inclusive practice means that we are respectful of each other, and are able to constructively challenge how we work. This also applies to our open approach to collaborating with partners, artists and our community.

Generosity

We care about how we work, and who we work with. We are welcoming in our approach and generous with our time and attention. We demonstrate kindness throughout our practice, and want to create a place to work and be that is supportive and enjoyable.

Always learning

We believe in reflecting on our practice and reviewing how we work, and enjoy having an evaluative approach to what we do as a company and as individuals. This means that we're always challenging ourselves and learning, finding and developing new ways to work better.



Creativity

We are a creative organisation, and we value the importance of being able to think and work creatively in our roles as individuals - whatever they might be – as well as collectively as a company. This challenges us to be imaginative, and aspirational and find solutions and think differently. We value creativity as a human right, and work hard to ensure this permeates the whole organisation.

2 Core Principles of Participation with Vulnerable Adults (developed with Homeless Link)

Regularity

Many homeless people feel isolated and their lives are dominated by change and uncertainty. Even when rehoused, they may be living in communities where they know very few people and can become further isolated resulting in many returning to homelessness. When your life is changing it is vital to have something that you can rely on come what may. Too many projects with vulnerable people end directly after some kind of event (a concert, exhibition). The sense of loss can be great as it can leave people with nowhere to take their new-found confidence and self-belief. If projects must end, it is always best to do so with sufficient wind-down and a solid exit strategy to help participants come to terms with the project ending. The day after performance/event is often the most important day of the project.

High Expectations

Facing homelessness often results in facing low expectations – from others and from yourself. If you have high expectations of people it often gives them the permission to believe in themselves. It is also possible to create artistic excellence in process and product with a group of vulnerable adults without excluding anyone but it is essential that expectations are reasonable and people are not set up to fail.

Trying something new

When people achieve something that they didn't think they would be able to do, this opens up doors of opportunity to them and often results in them trying something new or tackling a problem in their lives. We believe that it is important to listen to what a group wants to do but not be afraid of encouraging them to try something completely new.

Being a creative person – a different identity

Every person comes to our work bringing their day-to-day lives with them - we allow them to leave this at the door and instead re-connect with the creative part of themselves. We do this by exploring opera - the plot, characters and music rather than using people's individual stories as material for our work. This process helps our performers forget issues that dominate their lives and also helps them feel as though they are not defined by their problems but have other interests, skills and talents. Our performers are given freedom within a structure to create their own ideas and have their own voice heard and developed either by improvising, writing text or music or developing staging.

Creating a safe place

All work with vulnerable people needs to be in a safe place; a place which can be in a variety of locations but where the members *feel* safe. This is created by a number of factors: somewhere familiar; someone present they trust; a structured approach to the session; expectations of behaviour so that they know they will be safe and where inappropriate behaviour is dealt with publicly and immediately; an atmosphere of acceptance and respect; a qualified support worker present; quality leaders who have been trained. Boundaries are often also important when working with vulnerable people. Many people have had relationships that have been damaging which makes social situations, making friends and interacting with strangers potentially confusing. If it is clear at the outset that performers can expect a friendly atmosphere but not a social relationship with staff or visitors, it helps them know where they stand and prevents them being let down.

Affirmation

Homeless people are often looked-down upon and they are defined by their problems rather than their achievements. Congratulating them for their work is essential and can be transformational when



this has never happened to you before. Everyone who walks through the door of one of our projects will be encouraged and their achievements publicly affirmed.

Evaluation

Evaluation helps every initiative understand what it is trying to achieve and to grow and strengthen. If you understand your aims and know how to measure them, you can see clearly how the work is progressing. It is essential to be honest where things have gone wrong in order to improve.

Community

When we ask our performers about what they like best about Streetwise, the social side of the project always comes out top. We never forget that what we build is community as well as confidence and self-esteem.

Everyone is welcome

If people are used to being rejected, setting up a system where there is a possibility to fail e.g. auditions should be avoided. There are obvious exceptions to this for instance with progression activities for the most independent performers.

Fun

Whatever the activity it must be fun, otherwise why would people come!

3 Artistic Policy

Streetwise Opera aims to create productions that are of **equal social and artistic excellence**. We believe it is important to involve our performers in projects which are entirely inclusive and where the process is safe and nurturing but also where the final product is of high artistic quality. This dual focus helps shine a light on the achievements of our performers and homeless people rather than their needs.

The company has developed further values that are present in all productions:

Artistic ambition – in striving for artistic excellence in our productions, we want to be ambitious and innovative. This might be achieved by commissioning new music and exploring new ways of producing and presenting operas including using film and exploring site specific work

Focusing on the art not on homelessness – the lives of our performers can be dominated by negative experiences that have happened to them. We invite our performers to leave those issues at the door and, in a supported environment, be treated as artists not homeless people. Productions will therefore not be about homelessness or issues experienced by homeless people and when difficult issues/themes come up, we help performers work on those issues through characters/the third person rather than their own personal experience. Occasionally we will work on testimony projects in a more supportive way

Partnerships with professional artists and support workers – all our productions have a core of professionals behind-the-scenes and on stage performing with the Streetwise cast. We aim that the quality of the performance is the result of this collaboration – the sum of the parts being greater than the constituent sections. Meanwhile our performers are always supported by professional support workers who are present in every session and our productions fit into the overall support structure of our performers

Streetwise performers and audiences interacting – every Streetwise Opera production will give opportunities for audience and performers to interact with each other. This might be achieved through the staging, audience participation or creating interactions as the audience arrive or leave



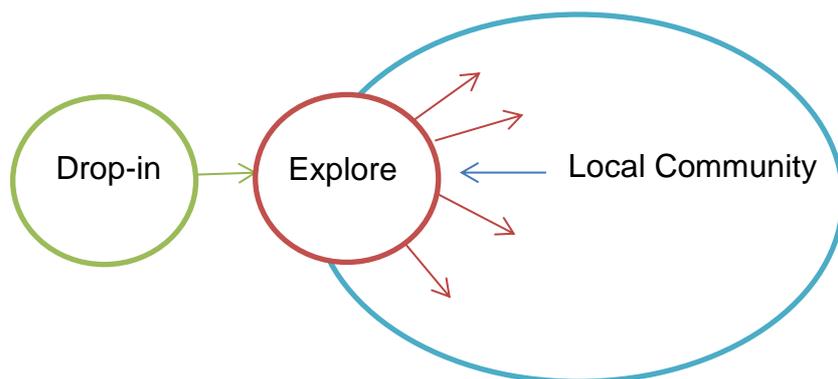
4 Programmes of Work

a) Workshop Programme

Workshops – the core of our work is a programme of regular, weekly participatory music and drama workshops taking place around England (in London, Manchester, Nottingham, Teesside and Newcastle/Gateshead).

We have a ‘Tier 1’ and one ‘Tier 2’ programme in each city in which we work. The Tier 1 sessions (called ‘Drop in Singing and Acting’) will take place in front-line homeless centres (plus also additional recovery centres and refugee centres). When ready, performers from Drop-in will be encouraged to join the Tier 2 (Explore) workshops which take place outside the homeless sector in arts venues and called ‘Explore Singing and Acting’. These sessions will be open to people in the community who haven't experienced homelessness thus helping former homeless people integrate more into mainstream community. This model allows us to target the needs of different groups more effectively and will help facilitate better progression for homeless people into the community.

Drop-in workshops focus on confidence-building and well-being; Explore will build on this by providing more integration and opportunities in the community. Ultimately the programme is designed to help people move out of homelessness for good. Most Explore projects are run in partnership with an arts organization in each region (including Southbank Centre, mima, Sage Gateshead and Theatre Royal Nottingham).



Performances – all groups perform in their communities. Explore groups do this regularly and Drop-in perform occasionally (so a 'drop in' feel is maintained and workshops don't become too dominated by rehearsing). These performances range from informal 'sharings' to conferences, festivals and other events. Most performances would feature about 5-15 minutes of music that has been rehearsed in the regular, weekly workshops. Each year, the Drop-in and Explore groups will come together for an Opera Hour (an informal hour of work in progress, speeches, audience participation and the screening of a short film – see below).

Concert/opera/theatre Trips – all groups go to see opera, classical music and other pieces of theatre and performance. When the groups attend an opera performance, they will work on the opera for several weeks in advance, singing the main melodies, exploring the plot and characters and improvising on themes etc so they often know more about the piece than most of the audience. This instils pride and a sense of belonging in the community. It also results in our performers feeling less nervous about going into other buildings in the community.

Progression Opportunities including Work Placement Scheme – we offer a wide range of progression opportunities to help our performers integrate more fully into community life including volunteering for other arts organisations; becoming an Ambassador (supporting Streetwise's work through speaking in public, and buddying new members); a Work Placement Scheme which offers Streetwise performers work experience in arts organisations e.g. venues, museums and festivals. These placements may be one-off days or more long-term depending on the availability of opportunities and the needs of the performer.



From 2016 we have also introduced programmes to integrate our performers more into the heart of decision-making – two former members have joined the Board of Trustees, there are new performer committees to help many decisions from strategy to repertoire choices.

b) Opera Productions

Streetwise Opera has a biennial opera cycle including one 'main' production and Opera Hours. The main production will take place in each region in turn and the Opera Hours take place in all the other regions. The opera season reflects our artistic policy by including both existing repertoire and new commissions. New commissions involve composers working with our performers where the texts are created by the performers.

Main Productions

Streetwise Opera performs 'main-stage' opera productions every two years which include live performance. These operas have high production values and aim to be of equal artistic and social merit i.e. we aim for both the product and the process to be strong. In this way, we demonstrate to our performers that they can achieve great things. We find that having high expectations of people in a safe environment is often the key to people moving forward in their lives. This also helps promote positive attitudes to homeless people in an arena that is not tokenistic. We believe that the artistic standard of our productions is achieved through the combination of the skills and experiences of both the Streetwise performers and the professionals involved.

Opera Hours

The Streetwise Opera season also includes a collection of informal sharings every year in every region called Opera Hours. These performers showcase what the group has been working on and contains the following elements:

Opera Hour running order:

- Both groups perform an opening chorus
- "Welcome" by one of our performers
- An interactive warm-up for everyone, including the audience, led by workshop leaders and performers
- Introduction by performers and sharing of the term's work by each group, together or separately
- Introduction by a performer (or other artist e.g. Composer in Residence)
- Both groups sing a new piece or premiere the work by their Composer in Residence
- Introduction of the International programme by a performer/MP
- Explore only or both groups perform a chorus that illustrates our International programme e.g. Japan/Brazil
- Introduction by a performer
- New Streetwise workshop film
- Thanks to all by a performer
- Both groups perform a rousing chorus

c) With One Voice – International arts and homelessness movement

In 2016, Streetwise Opera launched a new global arts and homelessness movement which aims to support projects of all sizes and art-forms around the world.

Mission

With One Voice is an international movement that aims to strengthen the arts and homelessness sector through exchanges in practice and policy.

Background

People who have experienced homelessness face challenges that are not just about housing. They suffer chronic social and cultural exclusion and many have experienced trauma, resulting in low self-esteem and mental health issues. The role of the arts in supporting homeless people through improving wellbeing and



social inclusion has had a great impact in some countries, but in others, this approach is poorly understood or not used at all. There is no formal or informal international community for such work. Existing projects are isolated and do not share learning; there is little inspiration or guidance for new projects.

Streetwise Opera has begun to bring the international arts and homelessness community together through projects leading up to successive Cultural Olympiads in London 2012 and Rio 2016. These projects have helped to build the capacity and infrastructure of arts and homelessness groups in many countries through exchanges in practice and policy – the work has resulted in an expansion of projects, more local networks and homelessness policy being shared and replicated (particularly Brazil's Homeless People's Movement being implemented in Manchester).

Streetwise Opera is now formalising this work and developing it from individual projects associated with the Olympics to a full-time international arts and homelessness movement. This movement will build on the success of the model of exchange to help strengthen the arts and homelessness sector globally. The movement will be project managed by Streetwise Opera and piloted for 5 years.

Project aims

- To strengthen existing arts and homelessness activity
- To inspire new arts and homelessness activity
- To increase awareness of the importance of arts for people with experience of homelessness globally
- To influence policy in relation to homelessness and the arts

Outputs 2016 – 2020

Organise annual exchanges between arts and homelessness organisations, policy makers, practitioners and homeless people in Olympic host countries and elsewhere in the world

Organise biennial arts and homelessness summits

Provide incubation and sustainability support for new initiatives and projects

Create online resources to celebrate and connect arts and homelessness projects and artists who have experienced homelessness including building a sector map; an evidence library; funding links; project management templates

5 Workshop framework

In addition to our Core Principles of Participation, all Streetwise Opera work:

- Is led by professional musicians – ideally a singer and a pianist or two singers – trained in running this programme
- Is attended by a support worker
- Has an 'Open-door' policy and involves no auditions
- Uses many techniques that are non-language based so as to be engaging for people for whom English is not their first language – examples of this include use of percussion instruments, clear gestures to indicate singing together, high/low pitch, soft/loud, vocal technique etc.
- Concentrates on the personal benefits of arts participation and increase in skills. We communicate that we are not a professional development programme but we can sign-post participants to other such groups and courses
- Involves everyone contributing – there is a welcome for everyone who attends; everyone is addressed by their name and by the end, everyone has contributed something
- Has a set of Streetwise Values for the workshops that are agreed with the performers. These start with 'Respect each other and take part' and the performers may add to these
- Will include opera as 'core' repertoire although a variety of other styles are also used
- Is multi-layered – giving performers the chance to sing, act, improvise, direct (give ideas to the leader about how a scene can be staged), work in a team, have their ideas listened to



- Uses a variety of approaches regarding plot and character for example, 'Hot-seating' characters – individuals in the group all get the chance to play a character in a piece so that everyone gets familiar with the piece in greater depth and one person is not associated with one role

Tier 1 (Drop-in)

Aims:

- Workshop to have a drop-in feel, emphasis on new participants
- Flexible enough to accommodate individuals' requirements and skills
- Use a variety of repertoire including opera in each workshop
- Engage a variety of tools including use of instruments, un-tuned percussion, poetry and text, composition and improvisation
- Provide a space at the end of each workshop for a participant solo item
- Avoid a 'drilling' approach which can alienate new participants

Example of Drop-in Workshop structure:

- Warm-up and welcome
- Stage skills exercises, ice-breakers, physical work and vocal improvisation
- Non-operatic repertoire, possibly using instruments
- Introduce the operatic repertoire via melody, story, text or character
- Solo slot
- Tea Break
- Brief warm up possibly to include the regular 'performance' chorus (see below).
- Operatic repertoire continued, to include improvisation and devising
- End with non-operatic song or 'performance' of today's opera scene

Tier 2 (Explore)

Aims:

- Workshops to be project based, each term's material building throughout the 12 week course
- Workshop to provide a regular stable space for existing participants who commit to a term and will for the most part be regular attenders
- Some flexibility to accommodate requirements from the group e.g. to work on specific repertoire or genre
- Main content of the workshop to focus on opera and performance skills
- Sessions will include rehearsing performance programme
- The programme will be open to including other areas of performance in a project, such as lighting, set design, or occasionally another genre such as dance

Example of Explore Workshop structure:

- Warm-up led in conjunction with a participant
- Skills using physical and vocal
- Operatic repertoire
- Any discussion/ announcements
- Tea Break
- Improvisation
- Rehearse opera set for performances
- Revisit opera material from first half of session