

Space for Storytelling 2023-4 Evaluation
London Dreamtime

OUR PRINCIPLES: We believe in the awesome power of oral storytelling to create wonder, empathy and togetherness.

All artists to be paid a fair fee. All workshops and opportunities to be free and available to all without favour. Everyone to be welcomed and encouraged regardless of background or experience. All workshops to be wheelchair accessible. Participants encouraged to be thoughtful, inclusive and kind.

"I can trace my own artistic life back to contact with free community arts spaces back in Birmingham. Space for Storytelling is like that too- and it's so important that it can be free to access, to welcome everyone who wants to practice, listen or otherwise engage with the artform. I was really happy to help make it happen!" Debs Newbold.



This report covers the following:

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1)Background

At the start of 2022, as a response to Covid lockdowns and the skyrocketing cost of venues, Vanessa Woolf fundraised to create a [free in-person storytelling club at Elephant and Castle](#). The club connected with existing night "Tales at The Tavern" run by Niall Moorjani. The two story clubs co-operated to rebuild the live grassroots storytelling scene in London.

Over the next year many of London's storytelling clubs returned in-and new storytellers entered the scene.

2)New needs

In 2023, the impact of Covid, Brexit and cuts to the arts led to new needs.

Storytellers (new and established) are struggling to find their feet in a hostile economic climate with fewer artistic spaces available with festivals and funding streams closed down.

London's storytellers needed

- good quality *inexpensive* training
- in-person networking opportunities,
- business development opportunities - storytellers needed to be paid for their work
- free venue & audience to try longer works-in-progress.

3)Fundraising process

Fundraising started in April 2023.

Most money was raised via a [crowdfunder](#) where storytellers and artists and authors donated gifts and services.

This culminated in a gala performance at Asylum Chapel Peckham (a stunning venue - generously paid for by supporter Fiona Clements.) The following artists performed for free: Debs Newbold, Hannah Need, Mary Honeybone, Rez Kabir, Emma Charlton, Anna Maria HellbergMoberg, Arkem Mark Walton, Laura Sampson, Aaron Oliver, Niall Moorjani.

BUDGET

The total amount raised was £5310

costs:

Crowdfunder platform fee & vat £183

Crowdfunding expenses eg postage/ travel /expenses £105

Admin & stationery £50

Apprentices: £246

Venue £0

Artist fees £3000

Remainder: £1716 This will be used for more workshops and potentially to create some more apprentices.

4)Space for Storytelling Workshops Venue

Our project was given a huge boost by the team at St Johns Waterloo who offered the use of a large, beautiful, centrally-located, wheelchair-accessible arts-space once a month for a year. Our project became part of "Room For You" and now takes place in partnership with The Bridge at Waterloo charity based at St John's Waterloo. We extend our heartfelt thanks to them as the project could not happen without them.

"Space for storytelling has quickly established itself as a vital part of London's storytelling ecosystem, it's been such a privilege to be a part of a project which has brought together so many storytellers, created space for all communities within that umbrella and most importantly provided free and accessible pathways into storytelling as a career. I'm so grateful it exists and so grateful I am involved in such a wonderful project." -Niall Moorjani

5)Facts and figures: Workshops 2023-4

- Free wheelchair-accessible workshops for storytellers
- An accessible space for works-in-progress and networking
- An apprentice scheme to support new storytellers to develop professional working practices.
- A place where people from different backgrounds can support each other.

We ran:

Six 'teaching' workshops.

Two work-in progress shows.

Two multi-voice showcases.

One masterclass.

Detail: Open mic stories/Masterclass & show with Sally Pomme Clayton. /3 Work in Progress shows /Queering Folk Tales ([Niall Moorjani](#)) /Storytelling for Heritage & museums ([Dave Tonge](#))/Multivoice showcase (hosted by Sally Pomme Clayton who stepped in to cover when Vanessa was unwell)/1 x Work-in-progress show with Alys Torrance and Chloe Bezer/Discover your Voice. ([Giles Abbott](#)) /Business & marketing for storytellers (Vanessa Woolf) /Your Mind Matters ([Emma Charlton](#)) Hosted by 'Elephant Tales' as Vanessa was away. /Crafting Longer Storytelling Shows ([Polis Loizou](#))

Our final workshop, which was scheduled for August 2024, was cancelled because the workshop leader, Penny Pepper, was unwell.

Everything was free & wheelchair accessible.

Members of The Bridge creative writing class (some of whom have experienced homelessness or are refugees) were always invited to join us. Some Space for Storytelling participants also joined The Bridge creative writing class!

6)Challenges and successes: Workshops

Diversity. We felt as if we were successful in reaching a wide cross section of storytellers.

Participants differed in terms of age, ability, social class, ethnicity, nationality, race, gender and sexuality.

We would like to reach more disabled people and more local people.

Reach. We found that the sheer variety of content attracted a diverse audience. Some people were very excited by the technical workshops (for example vocal training). Some people only came to listen to the shows, and other people wanted the opportunity to perform. This meant that while we had a core audience who came to everything, we were able to reach almost everyone in London's storytelling community at some point during the year as well as plenty of interested folk who were NOT in the storytelling community.

Atmosphere and networking. It is always great to see people excitedly chatting, helping each other and networking, lingering behind long after the official ending. Participants were friendly, welcoming and supportive.

Numbers. We had an average of 20 attendees per workshop with a maximum of 60 and a minimum of 8. Workshops which were attended by a small number of people still had excellent feedback with participants reporting a high quality experience.

An issue with public recognition and understanding As a result of holding workshops AND performances, it was not always easy to clarify our purpose and occasionally we had people turn up for a workshop to find we were doing a performance- and vice versa. In future we will focus more strongly on workshops.

An issue with collecting feedback. We did not have a dedicated feedback box. In future we will have one.

480 tickets were claimed on Eventbrite although not everyone who booked a ticket turned up!

A few quotes:

"very useful. I do feel I'm gaining in confidence as a storyteller."-Anna-Maria

"a very receptive and fun group to work with - the time flew by" -Dave

"Such relaxed and welcoming atmosphere" Tatiana

"Access to training opportunities are often limited for me because of cost and work and family commitments. Having a free monthly space to focus on my storytelling is wonderful."-Mary

"I thought the workshop was excellent. I'm so glad I came along." -Ariel

It is such a privilege to be able to share that creative space with other tellers - thank you, thank you! -Chloe

"lovely opportunities to tell with kindred spirits" -Laura

"I had a ball!" - Polis

"The space you have created is phenomenal. To be able to share a story, unfinished, unready with an audience and not be nervous about feedback is an incredible thing. You and the audience are welcoming, supportive, inquisitive, insightful." -Hannah

"what a great event it was!" -Diana

"I'm so thrilled by what you've achieved this year. I worked with a lovely group of people (who attended my workshop) who wouldn't be a group at all, but for you." -Giles

We had a safe and incredibly responsive evening of performing, insightful questioning and discussion. The deep engagement of all the people who came, and Vanessa's calm hosting proved an important steppingstone: it has given us the confidence to carry our project forward to the next stage. -Alys

"Such a good workshop, really useful"- Bernadette

"I'm learning LOADS" -Emma

7)Facts and figures: Apprentices

We recruited via Vanessa's mailing list and social media. We accepted six people onto the scheme.

Mentoring:

Apprentices got dedicated professional storytelling mentor, a variety of supported opportunities to tell stories in different settings over the year and had travel & food expenses paid.

Expenses:

Apprentices did not always choose to claim their expenses.

The total cost was £246 with some still pending.

Our mentors were Niall Moorjani, Vanessa Woolf, Hannah Brailsford, Emily Hanna, Jumana Moon, Minnie Wilkinson

Time commitment:

Apprentices were asked to commit to all 12 workshops and to complete once- monthly storytelling placements.

Placements included:

A 30-minute adult storytelling slot generously offered by Surrey Storytellers.

A five minute story for adults at Space for Storytelling

A public all-age performance at St John Waterloo for Open House

Storytelling at The Salmon Youth Club

Storytelling at Mosaic LGBTQIA youth club

Story at the Lantern festival in Southwark Park

A day of stories for families at The Blue Market Bermondsey

A storytelling sessions designed to teacher's brief at Robert Browning Primary School

Stories for elders at The Peel Institute

Job-shadowing Vanessa at National Literacy Trust

We also had a zoom call in which we spent an hour as a group discussing the ethics of telling scary stories.

8)Challenges and successes: Apprentices

The apprentice scheme was one of the most challenging parts of our programme. Although we knew that we did not have enough money or resources to create a full apprentice programme, we hoped to create enough opportunities for people to benefit.

The issues we faced:

- 1) No one was paid. It would have been a lot better if the apprentices could have been paid above expenses for their considerable time and effort. *

Vanessa was not paid to organise the scheme. Organising the opportunities was a huge amount of work which had to be done in spare time. The eventually contributed towards Vanessa's illness in December 2023.

- 2) The biggest setback came when Vanessa was taken ill and had to step back from the scheme after just four months. When she recovered, she was able to arrange a few more opportunities but regular monthly shows ended.
- 3) Several apprentices suffered from challenging personal situations over the year.

The combination of these three issues led to only two apprentices completing the whole year.

However all apprentices still gained a huge amount from the scheme.

A few comments:

"I highly value the sessions with my wonderful mentor, who was clearly carefully chosen to meet my style, interests etc." -Emma

"Whilst the programme was running the opportunities allowed me to perform for different groups pretty much monthly which was wonderful. The schedule of having gigs helped me to complete stories I would not otherwise have written or finished... I truly believe that if done to the full year it would have been incredible. Even in it's shortened form I gained a lot of experience and connections." -Elena

"It's all been super useful in my development, and has given me the experience needed to apply for other jobs as well!" -Aaron

"The storytelling opportunities have been excellent - I've done storytelling with organisations and groups who I would not have had opportunities to otherwise." - Emma

"I feel very exhilarated... it was brilliant" -Fiona

"discussing things with the group and my mentor as well as getting more hands on experience has made me a much better storyteller" -Aaron

"it helped me improve my relation to and confidence with the audience in all areas of performing. It also helped me in using props and other tools." -Elena

"It has led to me going full time as a storyteller!" - Aaron

*NOTE If we were ever to pay apprentice storytellers, we would then become employers and would have new duties of responsibility. The selection process (choosing apprentices) would also become more competitive and difficult.

9)Unexpected benefits of the Space for Storytelling Project

A year of new funding.

The success of the project enabled Vanessa to apply for and get funding for a new season from South Bank Waterloo Neighbours, supported by Lambeth Together.

One-off workshop funding x 2.

The success of the project enabled Vanessa to apply for and get one-off funding from Heritage Compass to run a workshop with a professional copywriter around one of the biggest issues facing storytellers- explaining their work.

This workshop will be videoed so that non-Londoners can also benefit.

One of Vanessa's collaborators is also applying for funding for a one-off workshop for Space for Storytelling. The application is pending - we will find out more soon.

The connection with St John Waterloo...

led to a beautiful public performance as part of the Waterloo Festival around 40 attendees: "Secret Garden Stories". [Read about it here.](#) St Johns Waterloo are home to the South Bank Sinfonia and have a strong artistic record. They are now keen to host future public storytelling performances.

A place to share opportunities.

Vanessa is able to share paid and unpaid work opportunities via a dedicated Space for Storytelling mailing list. ALL CVs and responses are passed on without favour or bias meaning more storytellers are able to hear about opportunities and pitch for work.

A stronger network of artists across London.

Vanessa stepped back from running her storytelling club in December 2023. It's now run by a supportive group of tellers as 'Elephant Tales'.

'Elephant Tales' has close links to 'Tales at the Tavern' and both are linked to Space for Storytelling, creating a three-way network of support, inspiration and opportunities. One of our regulars runs Surrey Storytellers, creating links there too. Another regular has started a new storytelling club in Ealing.

10)Vanessa Woolf Personal comments:

The project was demanding for me, including unpaid fundraising, organising workshops and apprentice opportunities. This led to me becoming ill and having to take four months off work -- less than ideal!

A project hoping to emulate this one should definitely include financial support for the organiser. Despite this, I am thrilled to witness our success.

For me, one of the best things about Space for Storytelling is the boost it has given to general morale and resilience of London's storytelling community.

It's a joy to see artists who have got to know each other *through the project* supporting and encouraging each other.

We need each other. Potential clients and audiences need to experience storytelling. Future storytellers need to experience storytelling.

We need to reach out to people outside our own demographic and involve them in the artform in meaningful ways. The only way anyone can become a storyteller is by *practicing storytelling with an audience*. The only way anyone can get work is by being seen -being 'out there' telling stories. We need a huge variety of storytelling voices out there to appeal to different tastes, styles and cultures.

Without *lots* of storytellers actively working, the storyteller-ecosystem will fade and die. Space for Storytelling has become a pivotal part of our ecosystem and I will never stop being grateful to the people who donated effort, items, money to making it happen.

"Free and welcoming access to arts and community shouldn't be a luxury." -Debs Newbold

11)Future

A new season starts September 2024. [Tickets here.](#)

"a really special and important project... I hope that you can somehow write about this project or record it – its layers of meanings and impact really are incredible"- Sally Pomme Clayton
