

London Bubble
Theatre Company



The Creating Justice programme

Final evaluation report

Ellie Mendez Sayer and Sophie Reid
July 2021



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Forewords

London Bubble Theatre

London Bubble Theatre frees people’s creative voices to foster a more connected and equal society. We care about creativity and community.

Having personally developed and delivered the Creating Justice programme over the last eight years, I have witnessed hundreds of young people embrace their creativity, express themselves, develop skills, gain confidence and find their voice. They have connected with the artists and practitioners delivering the programme, Youth Offending Service (YOS) staff and their peers, engaged in exploratory processes and made themselves vulnerable in doing so. These young people are resilient, brave and trusting. Through *Way Into Work* they have presented themselves at interviews and spoken about themselves in a positive light. Through *Creative Voices* they have told the stories that matter to them, often delving into highly observant social commentary and giving performances to rival any Netflix show! I have learnt from every single one of them.

With so much rich anecdotal evidence, it’s a pleasure to see the impact of the work discussed in such a thorough and nuanced way in this report. Reading it fills me with hope and reaffirms my belief that theatre, in its most basic form, can be instrumental in improving social and emotional wellbeing. Complexities of youth justice, socio-political context and systemic challenges will always mean barriers are present, but together, arts organisations and statutory services can collaborate to attune with, celebrate and ultimately boost the social and cultural capital of some of our most vulnerable young people.

I am thrilled that this report will enable our practice and learning to reach a wider audience and I hope you find it informative and useful.

Marie Vickers

Project Lead – Young Peoples Programme



Southwark Council

Our partnership work with London Bubble has become a core offer to young people involved in the YOS – not because it provides ‘offence-focused’ intervention but because creativity, play, communication and relationships are the building blocks to engaging adolescents in change. These sessions with Bubble staff allow everyone to be different and are carefully crafted by highly skilled practitioners to convince the most reticent that they can participate, have something to share and can achieve.

This report provides clear evidence of how much the statutory sector can benefit from working with creative services and what difference this collaboration can make to outcomes for children.

Jenny Brennan

Assistant Director Family Early Help & Youth Justice



A New Direction

A New Direction is delighted to support the Creating Justice programme. The programme brings together partners closely involved in supporting young Londoners at a time when coming together to enable the best opportunities for children and young people has never been more important. The findings and research shared in this report will be crucial in supporting future practice. It's been our pleasure to work with the team.



The Creating Justice programme

Final evaluation report

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1.0
Executive
summary

1.0 Executive summary

1.1 Introduction

London Bubble Theatre is a community theatre company based in Southwark. They run the Creating Justice programme which includes three projects that use the creative arts to work with children and young people in (or at risk of being in) the criminal justice system. These projects include 'Way into Work', 'Creative Voices' and 'Playing Safe'. The programme also includes communication and trauma-informed practice training for practitioners working with young people within Southwark. Due to Covid-19, Playing Safe was not delivered during the fieldwork period, so the evaluation did not cover this element. A summary of each project can be found in section 2.1.

The key aim of this evaluation was to explore and better understand what impact being involved with the Creating Justice projects has on the young people who take part. The research also explored the impact on practitioners who took part in the training run by London Bubble Theatre. The evaluation goes beyond simply describing the impacts and seeks to illustrate how they have been attained.

At the start of the evaluation a Theory of Change model was developed to help define the key impacts of the projects and articulate the different factors contributing to that impact. This model was continually revised throughout the evaluation, and will continue to be a live document that London Bubble Theatre will revisit and review. The Theory of Change model can be found in section 5. A rapid evidence assessment was also conducted to examine learning and evidence from existing programmes and theory and can be found here.

The evaluation took a mainly qualitative approach, involving one-to-one in-depth interviews and focus groups with young people, Southwark Youth Offending Service (YOS) officers, London Bubble staff, and practitioners who took part in the training. More details on the methodology can be found in section 3.2. The key findings from the evaluation are summarised below.

Ways of working

There are a number of deliberate choices London Bubble Theatre has made about how the projects have been designed and the culture and ethos that underpin their approach to working with young people. These factors are the key mechanisms that help explain how the Creating Justice projects achieve their impact. Below is a summary of what young people, Southwark YOS staff and London Bubble staff had to say about these fundamental ways of working.



Use of characters, stories and props: London Bubble use characters, stories and props to engage young people in the sessions. Young people feel this made the sessions more interesting. They find the stories and characters relatable and memorable, both of which suggest creative methods facilitate the learning process. They also allow for creative distance, since young people can draw on their own experiences without having to talk directly about themselves. Creative distance coupled with relatability allows young people to safely and comfortably reflect on their own emotions and experiences.



Final product: Creative Voices culminates in a final performance to which parents, YOS staff and others are invited. The final output gives young people a sense of achievement. The response young people receive from the audience also makes them feel proud and helps to build their self-confidence. It is also an opportunity to hear a wide range of perspectives on the themes that the play or film explores.



Creative methods, interaction and fun: The use of games and activities make sessions more fun and memorable. Consequently young people find the sessions entertaining, stay engaged throughout and participate in each session. The variety of creative methods allows young people to express themselves on their own terms and explore their own interests and talents. The fun atmosphere helps mitigate negative associations with their court order and involvement with the YOS.



Group work: Working in a group creates a sense of being a part of something. Group work also provides an opportunity to learn about effective communication and collaboration. Young people enjoy listening to other people's opinions. They also feel listened to, respected and supported by others.



Collaborating with stakeholders and creating 'pathways': London Bubble work closely with Southwark YOS to ensure young people get the most out of sessions. The YOS share information that allows facilitators to adapt sessions to best meet the needs and preferences of young people. Taking part in London Bubble projects also increases young people's willingness to participate in other groups that the YOS can refer them onto. Close working arrangements have also led to YOS staff feeling more confident to use creative approaches in their own work.



Near peers: London Bubble deliberately choose facilitators who are young, from similar backgrounds, and who have grown up in the same part of London. They are therefore better able to understand young people's day-to-day realities leading to more honest and natural conversations. In particular, having young Black male facilitators allows young people to see adults who look and sound like them doing something positive (because young Black males are overrepresented in the criminal justice system).



Flexibility: London Bubble understand that a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate because each group of young people will have different needs, preferences and learning styles. They therefore take a flexible approach to running sessions and are always prepared to amend the plan.



Youth led and person centred: Facilitators work hard to find ways in which each young person will feel comfortable to engage and contribute. Young people appreciate that they are given the space and time to input in their own way. No matter how a young person chooses to engage, facilitators make everyone's contributions feel valuable. London Bubble staff also work hard to make every young person feel seen and heard and as if they matter. Young people are in charge of developing stories or scenarios, which gives them a sense of real ownership over the project.



Un-shockable and non-judgemental: London Bubble create accepting and safe spaces where young people do not feel judged. No-one is labelled an offender or a trouble maker and everyone is treated as an equal participant. Facilitators work hard to ensure young people feel free to talk about sensitive topics. As a rule young people are not shut down for making extreme or inappropriate comments, but instead invited to discuss things further. This approach allows the group to delve deeper into important issues, and gives facilitators the opportunity to challenge young people respectfully and offer alternative perspectives



Pro-social modelling: Facilitators model the behaviours they ask young people to exhibit in return. Sessions are run by between two and four facilitators which works well in terms of modelling good behaviour – such as mutual respect, turn taking, listening and positive interaction. Young people note that facilitators behave in a way that encourages them to be kind and respectful and communicate positively.



Behaviour management: London Bubble manage behaviour based on expectations of mutual trust and respect – rather than a more traditional and hierarchical approach. Facilitators create a space where everyone is treated equally and everyone must adhere to the same behaviour expectations (facilitators, young people and YOS staff). Co-facilitators use playfulness, laughter and banter with each other to try and address the inherent power imbalances between adults and young people in the room.

Impact – a summary of key findings

London Bubble Theatre and Southwark YOS both acknowledged from the start of this evaluation that the impacts that could be expected from these short term interventions were modest and small-scale. These projects cannot be stand-alone interventions, but instead must form part of an ongoing range of interventions delivered by different organisations in each young person's life. These projects were therefore seen as being able to build on what has come before, as well as lay the groundwork to help young people engage and take up the next opportunity. Within this context, the evaluation explored various short, medium and longer term impacts of these projects on the young people involved, which are summarised below.

Short term impact

Resilience: Some young people felt that the use of different scenarios in London Bubble Theatre sessions helped them reflect on how they responded when challenged. Whilst peers within the group often held differing views, young people noted that it felt like a safe space in which to practice getting views across assertively and amicably. The sessions also pushed young people to step out of their comfort zone, whilst knowing that it was a safe space within which to take a risk. London Bubble and YOS staff felt that the sessions therefore provided young people with an appropriate level of challenge.

Confidence: Young people felt they had increased their confidence to take part and to speak up over the course of their engagement, especially in a group setting. This was attributed to receiving positive feedback and having felt listened to and respected by facilitators and peers. Feeling a sense of achievement in co-creating the film or play, or in doing well in the mock interview, also raised young people's confidence. The projects helped young people identify skills or talents they already had and gave them a sense of optimism about how these could be further developed and used in the future.

Communication: Young people reported getting enjoyment out of being able to articulate themselves and be understood in the sessions. Young people found it particularly helpful that facilitators were patient and gave them time to articulate themselves. They also frequently reported feeling they had got better at listening to other people. They recognised that this allowed them to reflect on their own thoughts and improve their own ideas. Part of what made this effective in the sessions was the facilitators modelling turn-taking, and allowing everyone to contribute.

Wellbeing: Young people spoke about feeling better about themselves because of reactions to their contributions to the sessions from their peers, London Bubble facilitators, YOS staff and other adults. Young people felt a sense of achievement, as well as feeling more respected and listened to. For some, the sessions provided them with a welcome respite from normal life – an opportunity to relax, laugh and have fun. Facilitators saw the sessions as an opportunity for young people to be 'praised, accepted, and responded to with curiosity and empathy', which they observed as leading to a sense of pride.

Relationships: Young people described their interactions with London Bubble facilitators as being incredibly positive, often saying they were kind, respectful and good at listening. The sessions provide a unique opportunity for young people to interact with adults (who traditionally are in positions of authority) on an equal footing. Young people differentiated the way London Bubble staff treated and spoke to them from how other adults would speak to them, particularly teachers. Young people also described the sessions as a safe space where they could engage with other peers in a calm and relaxed way. This felt unfamiliar because young people were used to being cautious and defensive when meeting new people. Southwark YOS staff felt that young people's engagement with London Bubble Theatre sessions could have a positive impact on their own relationship with them.

Self-awareness and management: The projects are designed in a way that deliberately prompts young people to explore how they might feel in a certain situation, and to think about how they could respond. Factors that facilitate this process include: reflecting on relatable scenarios; putting young people in charge of storytelling and role playing; allowing young people to safely explore relevant issues in a hypothetical and distanced way; and providing young people with an opportunity to recognise shared emotions in their peers. Facilitators observed young people constantly processing and re-evaluating their own perspectives. Young people spoke about the sessions helping them better understand their own feelings by giving them the opportunity to articulate their thoughts and opinions. Hearing what peers have to say also made them consider differing perspectives, reflect why people might respond differently and to have more regard for other people's feelings.

Medium and longer term impact

Relationships: Some young people felt that their experience with London Bubble might make it easier for them to ask other adults or professionals for help or advice in the future. They were now more willing to see the value in seeking out support, although they said this would depend on how other adults or professionals treated them. Working positively within a group made some young people feel more confident and comfortable about the prospect of working with others in a group setting in the future. There were some examples of how taking part in the London Bubble projects positively impacted upon existing relationships young people had with family members.

Improved problem solving: Following their engagement, some young people felt more confident and equipped to make better decisions. The sessions had increased their self-belief that they could improve and make changes in their own life, just like some of the characters in the storylines they had developed. The sessions also helped young people reflect on past mistakes and better understand their motives and triggers for reacting in certain ways. They felt more confident that they would not repeat mistakes and could now consider different and better ways of responding. London Bubble and YOS staff reflected on how young people are able to explore the consequences of different actions in a safe space and surmised that they would feel more equipped to think about what to do in certain scenarios and to recognise how different choices could lead to different consequences. It was however difficult to evidence this impact.

Engagement with new things: Young people said taking part in sessions made them see the value of trying new things and taking advantage of opportunities. Having a positive experience with London Bubble, even when they were initially unsure about it, helped them see the benefits of taking a risk and feel more confident to try new things they were interested in. The sessions can highlight the interests and skills that young people have, which can help YOS staff refer them to other relevant projects and opportunities. Furthermore, YOS staff also noted that following their involvement in the London Bubble projects, young people tend to trust the suggestions their case managers make about other opportunities.

Readiness: Readiness was defined as young people understanding that opportunities existed for them and feeling ready to take up those opportunities. The London Bubble Theatre projects helped raise young people's aspirations and understand the options available to them. Way into Work in particular helped young people think more actively about what they wanted to do as a career in the future. Hearing ideas about career options from other peers helped inspire and prompt ideas in the young people we spoke to. Young people spoke about feeling more prepared for future job interviews as a result of practice through role play and had learnt practical strategies.

Education and employment: Some concrete examples emerged of young people who had taken part in London Bubble Theatre projects going on to education and employment – and attributing this to their participation (particularly in Way into Work given its focus on preparing people for education, training or employment). Some young people reported having greater confidence to engage in other areas of their life due to taking part in London Bubble sessions, like at school, college or in the workplace. For some who had been out of mainstream education for a while, the London Bubble experience made them feel better prepared to return. The Way into Work sessions reinforced to young people the importance of practicing and preparing for interviews beforehand. Young people spoke about having more ideas and feeling more equipped and aware of how to go about looking for jobs to apply for and who they could speak to for advice. YOS staff also commented on how young people’s involvement in the project is a useful experience to include in their CVs.

Self-identity development: Young people spoke about how their involvement in London Bubble sessions led to them recognising their own strengths, interests and capabilities. They were more aware of what they had to offer and felt more confident about articulating this to other people. London Bubble staff saw the sessions as unique safe spaces where young people are given an opportunity to present a more playful and light-hearted part of their personality, whereas in most other spaces they experience pressure to present a tougher image.

Training

London Bubble ran two rounds of training sessions on trauma-informed practice and communication for practitioners working with young people. Practitioners who took part in the training sessions came from a range of different settings including the Southwark YOS, schools, police and the arts sector. This mix was seen as a great strength of the training as it allowed practitioners to hear different perspectives and strategies, share knowledge and expertise and think about how to work together more effectively to improve experiences and outcomes for young people.

The main impact of the training for most staff we spoke to was improving their confidence in using different approaches with young people that they worked with. Practitioners developed a greater understanding of the range of different techniques that could be used in communicating with a young person or the ways they could adapt their practice to take individual young people’s needs into consideration. Practitioners also spoke about how the training helped them reflect on their own practice. Some practitioners had already taken elements of what they learnt in the training into their work with young people, and shared their learning with other colleagues.

Practitioners enjoyed London Bubble Theatre training sessions because they were more interactive, with space for reflection and open discussion (compared to other training they had attended which involved the one way communication of a large amount of information). Practitioners found the practical discussions most helpful, and suggested building in even more space for trainers and attendees to share tips and ideas. Practitioners also wanted more time to interact and network with other practitioners that were present. This was a particular issue when training had to be delivered online due to Covid-19 restrictions.

1.4

Covid: enablers and challenges

The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated sweeping changes to the Creating Justice programme delivery. This involved sessions having to be delivered online and the final Creative Voices output being a film rather than a play. A summary of key enablers and challenges of delivering sessions during the pandemic are summarised in the box below:

Enablers	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Taking part in sessions online gave young people greater anonymity, which helped them feel more comfortable to contribute to sessions;• Facilitators adapted sessions to a virtual format successfully and were able to utilise interactive and engaging games online;• Taking part online increased rates of attendance;• Audiences for the final Creative Voices output were larger due to it being easier for family and YOS staff to attend online;• Developing a film instead of a play meant having a longer-lasting final output;• Online delivery allowed some young people to attend who otherwise would not have been able to, due to rivalries in the area where the YOS office is located.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less physicality and fewer creative exercises within the sessions;• Homes were not always conducive environments for creativity and young people could become distracted;• Young people having their cameras off made it difficult for facilitators to gauge their engagement and read body language;• Harder for relationships to be maintained following the project since cameras were mostly off so facilitators could not recognise young people in other contexts;• Opportunities for casual social interactions were lost;• Aspects of the projects which involved young people going outside their comfort zone were also more limited;• Harder to practice body language presentation in interview role plays;• Interaction with audiences was more muted in the final presentations.

1.5

Barriers, enablers and opportunities for delivery of the programme

Barriers

- London Bubble recruit young people for Creative Voices and Way into Work directly through Southwark YOS. Young people can therefore easily associate taking part in these London Bubble sessions with the obligatory part of their court order which can act as a barrier to getting young people to engage positively in the sessions;
- Young people can misunderstand what the sessions involve and feel anxious that they will be coerced into acting or taking part in a play. This can lead to young people entering the space feeling anxious and uncomfortable and ready to refuse to engage;
- Sometimes there is too much going on in a young person's life for them to be able to effectively engage in an intervention like Creative Voices or Way into Work.
- Many young people taking part through the YOS have particularly chaotic lives. This can impact attendance – whether that means missing sessions altogether or turning up late;
- Recruiting enough young people for Way into Work and finding the right structure to facilitate attendance has been a particular challenge for London Bubble and Southwark YOS.

Enablers

Note that many of the enablers for the delivery of the Creating Justice programme are outlined in the 'ways of working' section and are not repeated here.

- Demonstrating that London Bubble facilitators are equipped with the right training in order to safely and effectively engage with young people helps secure senior leadership buy-in from the YOS;
- The close working relationship between London Bubble and the Southwark YOS supports the delivery of all the Creating Justice projects. The YOS play an indispensable role in the recruitment and attendance of young people. They also provide information to facilitators that allows them to tailor sessions based on the needs and interests of young people;
- Having a YOS staff member present during London Bubble sessions is an effective way of demonstrating the value and impact of sessions to the YOS. This consequently boosts referrals. The YOS staff member can also feed information about the young person that emerges in sessions back to their case worker, which they can then use to better support the young person or think about future pathways;
- From the Southwark YOS perspective, London Bubble's willingness to amend session structure or session dates to meet the needs and priorities of the YOS is a key enabler.

Opportunities for the Creating Justice programme in the future

- Extend the number of sessions for both Creative Voices and Way into Work. This would enable the sessions to become a more consistent presence in young people's lives and allow facilitators to build stronger relationships. It would also allow young people to take part in several mock interviews or further develop, refine and input into the film or play;
- Lengthen the time of each session to accommodate latecomers and allow facilitators to chat one to one with young people as they arrive;
- Have every YOS staff attend at least one Creative Voices and Way into Work session. This could increase referrals and help officers explain the projects to young people;
- Going forward London Bubble could develop a hybrid model of delivery that incorporates both face to face and online delivery. For example holding an introductory online session to introduce the project and allow the group to get comfortable and build rapport;
- Both Creative Voices and Way into Work could continue to use films within their sessions;
- Invite a wider range of stakeholders from the borough to attend final performances;
- London Bubble facilitators could hold regular peer learning workshops to share learning and develop new ideas;
- London Bubble should continue to work with Southwark YOS to increase take up of other London Bubble Theatre opportunities following engagement with Creative Voices or Way into Work;
- London Bubble could hold a structured evaluation workshop with YOS case workers several weeks after a final session to discuss perceived impacts and consider what worked well or less well;
- London Bubble and Southwark YOS should work more closely to systematically gather and record longer term impacts, such as young people finding employment following taking part in Way into Work.

“

Getting young people to see past the next year, see past next summer, have some aspiration

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**2.0
The Creating
Justice
programme**

2.0 The Creating Justice programme

2.1 Summary of the programme

In October 2019, London Bubble Theatre commissioned independent researchers Sophie Reid and Ellie Mendez Sayer to complete an evaluation of the Creating Justice programme. This programme includes three projects which use theatre to work with children and young people in (or at risk of being in) the criminal justice system, including 'Way into Work', 'Creative Voices' and 'Playing Safe'. The Creating Justice programme also includes work with practitioners – offering communication and trauma-informed practice training.

Due to Covid-19, Playing Safe was not delivered in schools during the fieldwork period. It has therefore not been possible to interview young people or professionals involved in this project. The insights from this report are therefore focused on Creative Voices and Way into Work.

CREATIVE VOICES	WAY INTO WORK	PRACTITIONER TRAINING
<p>Up to 12 participants Range of ages, selected as most likely to engage and often at the start of order</p>	<p>Up to 12 participants NEETS (Not in Education, Employment or Training) 16-18 year olds, can include year 11 'leavers'</p>	<p>Creative Communication Training (CPD certified) / Trauma Informed Practice Training</p>
<p>Timescale varies, most recently 5 x 1 hour weekly sessions (1.5 hour in person)</p>	<p>Timescale varies, most recently 3 x 1.5 hour sessions over 3 consecutive days</p>	<p>Attendees are project partners including: theatre practitioners, YOS staff, school staff, schools police officers and peer navigators</p>
<p>Recruit through YOS Venue – YOS / Virtual</p>	<p>Recruit through YOS Venue – YOS / Virtual</p>	<p>Recruit through YOS and other partners</p>
<p>Delivered by 2-4 facilitators including 2 'near peers' & support from Peer Navigators and YOS staff</p>	<p>Delivered by 2-3 facilitators including 2 'near peers' & support from Peer Navigators and YOS staff</p>	<p>Delivered by 2 facilitators, including subject specialist</p>
<p>Activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drama games and discussions • Acting / Directing • Writing • Music • Use of Props (always start with a pair of trainers) 	<p>Activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drama games • Discussions about aspirations, interview technique, body language • Use of fictional character 'Duane' (including video) • Interview practice and 're-directing' interviews 	<p>Activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Games and discussions • Reflective practice • Creative practice • Presentations • Opportunities for networking
<p>Culminates with a sharing session (play or film during virtual delivery) of the work with an invited audience (YOS staff, parents etc)</p>	<p>Culminates with mock interviews (sometimes delivered in corporate business setting)</p>	

When thinking about the impact that London Bubble Theatre projects can have for young people, it is important to understand the context of the lives of those who participate. These young people face a number of challenges in their lives including: experience of trauma; speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and the perceptions and treatment of young Black men in UK society. This can lead to a lack of trust in adults and peers and make longer-term thinking difficult.



The majority of our young people generally do have speech and language needs



London Bubble Theatre and Southwark YOS staff identified that **many young people have experienced trauma throughout their lives**, including adverse childhood experiences as well as ongoing stress and challenging situations as they grow older. In addition, some staff felt that the experience of being arrested, going to a police station and being in the criminal justice system was itself traumatic. Some staff felt that one of the main challenges when working with these young people was that each person responded to trauma in a different way, meaning that the approach taken to support one young person might not work for another. In addition, issues in their familial life, such as substance abuse, mental ill health, domestic violence or moving between foster carers are ongoing pressures for some young people, so that home does not provide a routine or stable environment. This means that YOS staff must often work more holistically to support the wider family and siblings.

Speech, language and communication needs are so prevalent amongst young people in the criminal justice system, that Southwark YOS staff tend to expect this as the default – and every young person is assessed at the start of their court order. YOS staff described young people not being assessed or having their needs recognised at school, with symptoms being wrongly understood as bad behaviour and leading to exclusions and expulsions. There is often a stigma associated with speech and language needs. Consequently, staff reported that it can be challenging to talk to young people about their needs because they do not want to acknowledge the problem and accept help, or do not want another ‘label’. These communication needs could manifest themselves in difficulties concentrating or taking in information, which could affect engagement (for example, appointments might be missed due to a young person misunderstanding what was expected of them – amongst other issues around chaotic lifestyles).

“I think it’s easier to accept that they’ve got by default if you like. Because the majority of our young people generally do have speech and language needs [...] They’re labelled throughout their youth and to have another label it’s quite frightening” **YOS staff**

Young Black men are over-represented in the criminal justice system. Some staff felt that this was a result of structural problems, including racism and bias which young people faced alongside other challenges in their home life. In addition, Southwark YOS staff suggested that these experiences meant that some young people on court orders feel that their court order is unjust, which can make it more difficult to engage them in activities. In some cases there was evidence that YOS staff did not refer some young people if they felt there was a risk they wouldn’t engage, as they did not want to see them ‘breach’ their court order (for those for whom it would be a compulsory part of their order).

“Most of them are kind of intersectional kind of issues that they’re facing [...] the majority of them are young Black males. So you know, who are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, and they experience a lot of, you know, police involvement in their lives. Some rightfully and some, I guess, are stereotyped and there are biases, those are the challenges, racism is something that they experience daily and also with their age, and also their socio-economic background. So those are kind of, systemic stuff that’s built up against them.” **Youth Ink staff member**

This combination of factors can manifest itself in a **lack of long-term thinking and aspirations**. Some young people struggle to see the consequences of their actions, where for example stealing phones might be seen as a minor crime but several instances could build up and result in getting a criminal record.

*“**First speaker:** Getting young people to see past the next year, see past next summer, have some aspiration*


***Second speaker:** yeah because this is how a lot of people in the system live their life. No-one is planning that far, everyone just says next summer, next summer is gonna be mad, until you don’t make it to next summer.”* **Youth Ink staff members**

London Bubble Theatre and Southwark YOS staff described how young people often display a **lack of trust in adults and fear talking to people that they don’t know**. Whilst these behaviours are limiting their opportunities for growth and development, staff put this into context whereby not trusting others might be the safest options for most scenarios in their lives. In addition, for those who have come out of education, their social circle can be very small, which means they are not exposed to a wide range of perspectives. Group work in London Bubble Theatre projects, where young people are given a safer space in which to be open and engage with others, is therefore felt to be an important aspect of the programme.

“Issues about, you know, territory, gangs, [...] postcodes, you know, you have to be really cautious. And a lot of young people are very aware... So things like that stop young people to be just what we would do normally. They stop that because [...] it’s a way of them being safe.” **YOS staff**

Many young people who take part in London Bubble Theatre projects are also at an important point in their lives, in which **they are making choices about their future**. Some staff connected to the programme therefore felt that this was a particularly opportune moment in their lives for the London Bubble Theatre intervention.

“I think a lot of the young people are on the edge of education, so either kind of, come out of education completely or unsure sort of, at this kind of crossroads in... a lot of young people that do it, I think have missed the year and have been given the opportunity to maybe redo the year or leave education completely. And I think it’s often at that sort of brink of, OK what’s next? Is where a lot of the young people that engage in the programme are at. Which is why I think it’s particularly useful, as it encourages them to think ‘OK what can I do?’” **Youth Ink staff member**



3.0
Evaluation
aims and
methodology

3.0 Evaluation aims and methodology

3.1 Aims

The key aim of this evaluation was to explore and better understand what impact being involved with the Creating Justice projects (Creative Voices and Way into Work) has on the young people who take part. The research also explored the impact on practitioners who took part in the trauma-informed practice and communication training run by London Bubble Theatre. The evaluation goes beyond simply describing what the impacts have been and seeks to illustrate how they have been attained.

Key objectives of the evaluation:

1. Develop understanding of any impact that these projects may have on children and young people who are at risk of, or have experience of the criminal justice system.
This includes impact on:
 - a. Wellbeing and relationships;
 - b. The development of protective traits and behaviours including but not limited to: confidence, communication, self-awareness and self-management, problem solving and agency, and self-identity development.
 - c. Receptiveness and readiness to engage with other education and employment opportunities.
- 2.1. Explore (according to participant perceptions) how the design and cultural factors that underpin each project influence the way the sessions are delivered and the impact they have.
- 3.1. Explore practitioners' perception of any impact taking part in the range of training workshops being delivered has had on their skills, knowledge and practice.

Approach

Developing a Theory of Change model

At the start of the evaluation the research team spent time developing an understanding of the way London Bubble Theatre operates. This involved reviewing programme documents; initial discussions with key individuals working at a senior level within the organisation; and holding a Theory of Change workshop. These discussions and activities led to the creation of a draft theoretical model (developed collaboratively between the research team and London Bubble Theatre) to help articulate the different factors contributing to impact. These included: outcomes; activities; programme design, culture and ethos; and context, barriers and enablers. Each of these contributory factors was tested throughout the fieldwork. A focus group held at the end of the evaluation with London Bubble and Southwark YOS staff involved revisiting the Theory of Change model to discuss further amendments and suggestions. A model that illustrates the short, medium and longer-term outcomes has been revised following the completion of the evaluation and can be found on p.41 at the start of the Impact section. It is important to note that a Theory of Change model should not be a static model – but instead a live document that is constantly reviewed and revised.

Rapid Evidence review

The scoping phase also included carrying out a rapid evidence assessment. London Bubble Theatre were keen to examine learning and evidence from existing programmes and theory, to feed into their own programme of work, as well as identifying gaps that the evaluation might usefully be able to contribute to.

The rapid evidence assessment explored the following:

1. Practical examples of programmes using arts and theatre with children and young people in (or at risk of being in) the criminal justice system
 1. Their desired outcomes
 2. Any evidence of impact
 3. Which elements of the programme worked well or not
 4. Taking note of any measures the programmes used in evaluation
2. Theory/psychology of arts and theatre based interventions with children and young people

Fieldwork

The scoping stages of the research also fed directly into the development of all the topic guides used in subsequent interviews and focus groups.

A mainly qualitative approach was adopted, carrying out one-to-one in-depth interviews and focus groups with a range of respondents. The value of this approach has been to access in-depth insights from a range of stakeholders, exploring the nuances of their attitudes, feelings and perceptions first-hand. In particular, the interviews with young people have allowed us to explore in depth the range of different impacts they have described, as well as their perceptions of how the projects led to these impacts. Qualitative research provides depth and detail – and in this case has shed light on which parts of London Bubble’s work might lead to impact on a range of different protective traits and behaviours, but stopping short of direct causal links.

The fieldwork took place between January 2020 and April 2021 and is summarised below:

Fieldwork included:

- Initial Theory of Change workshops with London Bubble Theatre and partner organisations
- 11 interviews with 12 young people (6 young people who had taken part in Creative Voices and 6 young people who had taken part in Way into Work)
- 5 interviews with Southwark YOS staff (3 in relation to Creative Voices and 2 in relation to Way into Work)
- 2 interviews with London Bubble Theatre facilitators (one each for Creative Voices and Way into Work)
- Observation of a staff evaluation session for Way into Work
- Observation of a workshop presentation given by London Bubble Theatre and Southwark YOS on 'creative approaches to engaging vulnerable young people' based on learning from the Creating Justice programme
- 1 focus group with London Bubble Theatre staff focusing on ways of working and the impact of COVID-19 on delivery
- 1 focus group with London Bubble Theatre and Southwark YOS staff focusing on impact
- 6 interviews with 7 practitioners that had taken part in the trauma-informed practice and/or communication training

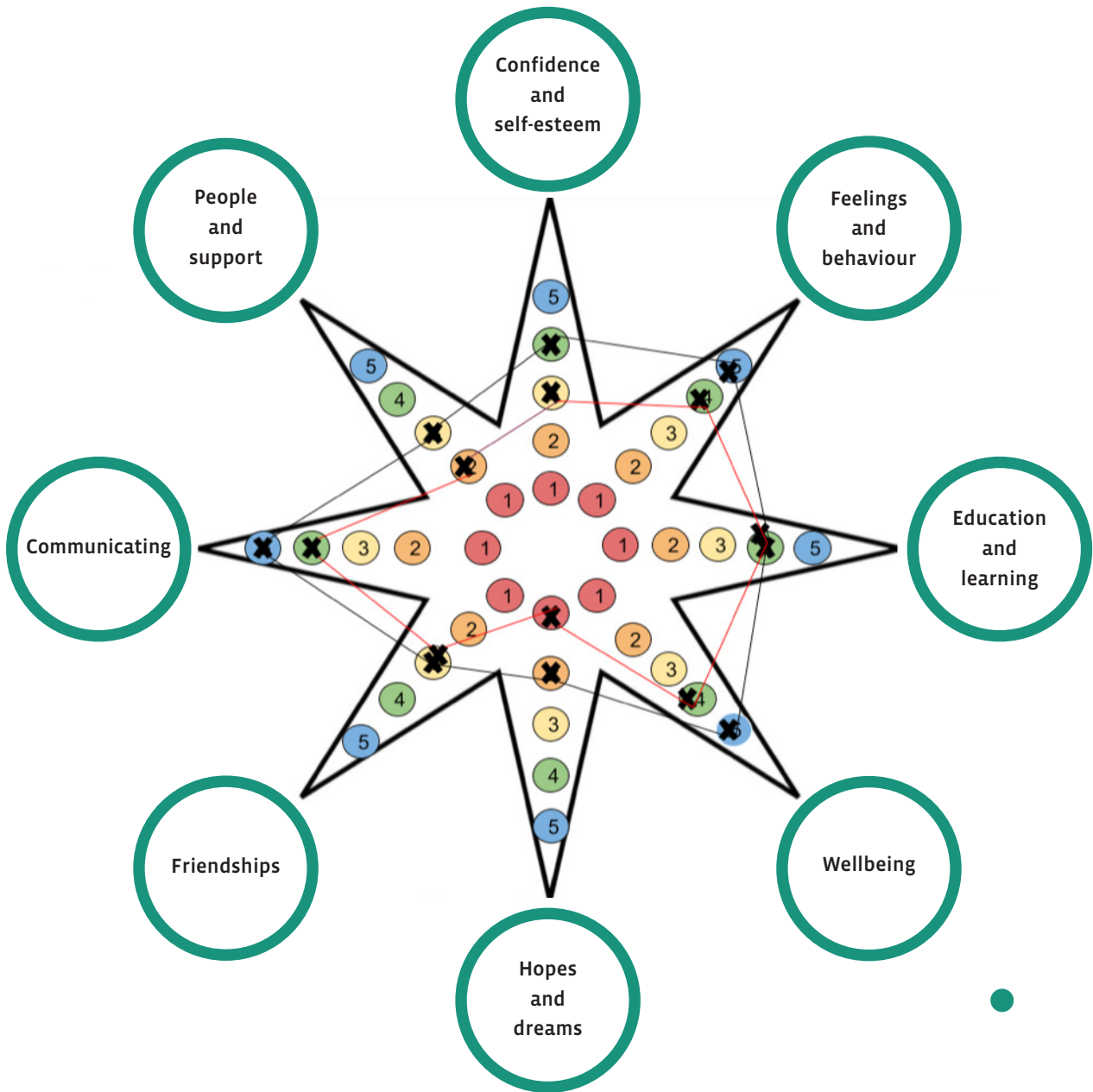
The interviews and focus groups combined structure with flexibility, with key topics covered in each, but the interviewer being guided by what the participant/s had to say. Discussion guides were prepared for all fieldwork. Interviews and focus groups were responsive and largely based on dialogue in order to ensure they remained open to new areas and unexpected information. The majority of interviews and all the focus groups took place remotely due to Covid-19 restrictions.

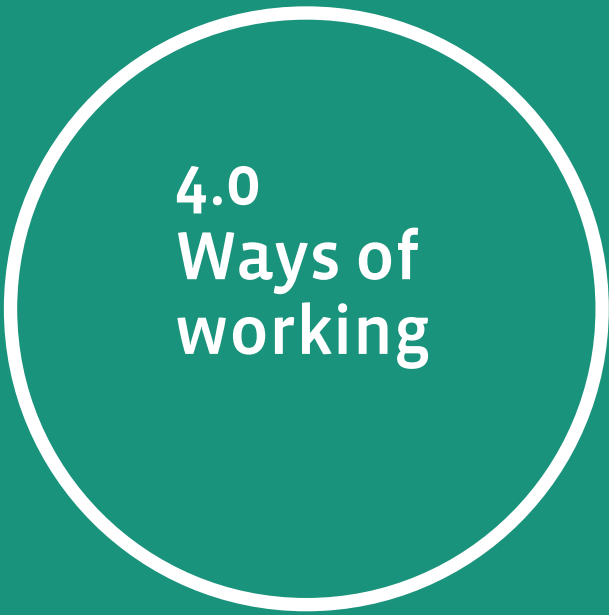
All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded with participant permission and fully transcribed. The interviews were then thematically coded and analysed. Firstly, key topics emerging from the data were identified and an analytical framework was devised, after which data from each interview was summarised under the appropriate heading.

We also designed a star diagram, for use with young people before and after their involvement in London Bubble Theatre sessions. A star diagram is a tool for a person to self-rate themselves on a series of different psycho-social elements, each represented by a point of the star. Each point to be rated has a scale which runs from 1-5, with 5 being the most positive where 'things are working well'. Similar tools are used to measure change across youth interventions, such as the 'wellbeing web'¹. Existing tools were assessed and the most important elements to measure included in a way which was most relevant to the context of London Bubble Theatre's programmes. The star diagram is designed for a young person to complete in conversation with a professional. They use accompanying cards which list a series of statements for each area and decide which statement or collection of statements best correlates with how they feel. The data is then collated across individuals and/or groups to see average change across each area as a result of the intervention. In addition, they can provide a visual representation of progress and change for each young person.


Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting delays and switch to online delivery, the star diagram is yet to be fully incorporated into delivery of London Bubble Theatre programmes, but has been tested with young people in some instances. The star diagram is included in Appendix A and indicative star diagram data is reported in Appendix B in this report.

¹ developed by Angus Council in 2011 (see case study for more information). The Wellbeing Web is based on the Outcomes Star family of tools developed by Triangle Consulting, which are licenced and validated tools. Our star diagram draws on these measures but is not a validated tool





4.0
Ways of
working



“

*It is so important
to understand
that not all
young people
communicate in
the same way*

”

4.0

Ways of working

London Bubble Theatre has designed the projects according to a number of deliberate choices and the culture and ethos factors that underpin their approach to working with young people. These factors are the key mechanisms that help explain how the Creating Justice Projects achieve their impact. Below is a summary of what young people, YOS staff and London Bubble staff had to say about these fundamental ways of working.

4.1 Design – Creative Arts

4.1.1 Use of characters, stories and props



The characters, stories and props helped to engage young people in the sessions. They are consistently used in all the London Bubble Theatre sessions, including for example the character of Duane in *Way Into Work*, and a pair of Air Force One trainers in *Creative Voices*. Young people commented that the characters and stories made the sessions interesting.

“At first it was just a shoe and then we worked our way up from a shoe to make this story. Then they’d just ask us for stuff to put in. Was the shoe old? Was it new? Did you just buy it from the shop? Questions like that. Then it would just get bigger. Then they’ll ask us, what did Charlie do? The person was called Charlie. What would Charlie do if he was in that situation? Sometimes you can kind of relate.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

Young people found it helpful to have a story that felt real and which they could relate to, allowing them to learn from the stories and scenarios they discussed. Importantly, the characters and scenarios were also highly memorable for the young people we spoke to, suggesting the creative methods facilitate the learning process for young people. In addition, the quality of the acting is an important part of the success of the projects; young people we spoke to commented on this and felt that the actors bring the stories to life and make them relatable.

“It was good, like I said you get to learn from what you’re doing, whatever you’re doing in that session and what it’s based on you get to learn and see where the mistakes is and where you can actually like progress from there and you could actually like relate to the situation.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

“because the people I was working with you could really tell that they like their job, honestly. Them two boys [LBT facilitators], they’re sick. They’re really good actors as well. Which makes it like, you’re just engaged honestly. You’re just sitting there engaged. It’s good.” **Young person • Way into Work**

Whilst the stories and characters were relatable, they also allowed for some ‘creative distance’ whereby young people could relate the character’s story to their own experiences without having to directly talk about personal experiences they might not feel comfortable sharing. This allowed young people to get over a significant barrier to participation, because they felt more comfortable to engage and contribute ideas since they weren’t expected to speak about themselves. London Bubble staff felt this was particularly beneficial in terms of allowing young people to speak about emotions, through the ‘prism’ of a fictional character. Some Southwark YOS staff felt they were then able to get more insight into the context of young people’s lives, because the project helped young people to open up about their emotions, aspirations and experiences.

“Duane was a good like, start [to conversations]. It helped [getting people to talk]. It helped them with the way that they would answer the question. They’re talking about their experience but they’re just switching it with Duane. Because some people don’t feel confident like talking, straight away about their own experiences.”

Young person • Way into Work

“Like obviously if I had to talk about myself I wouldn’t really want to take part innit. But when I know that I’m making up a character, innit and I can put in ideas. If I’m talking about myself yeah, I wouldn’t feel I was comfortable innit. Because why would I tell everyone about myself? Instead of like, just making up a fictional character.”

Young person • Creative Voices

4.1.2

Final product



London Bubble Theatre adapted the final product for Creative Voices during Covid-19. Creative Voices usually culminates in a play that the young people have created and to which parents, Southwark YOS workers and others are invited. During the Covid-19 pandemic and its restrictions, this was adapted to be a final film.

The final output gives young people a sense of achievement. For many young people, this is the first time they have contributed to a creative project, especially working with others in a group. Young people we spoke to commented that they felt that the quality of the final output was high and they were able to see the ideas that they had contributed. Some young people also felt a sense of achievement that they had maintained their involvement in the project all the way to the end.

“Yeah [the film] just made it come to life. I think it made everyone feel like we weren’t just getting asked questions for just a book and paper. Like we’d actually done something. It gives you the feeling of accomplishment. Because you watch the video and then mums watch the video, they’re like “Oh, he created that!”. And they just feel proud. That’s the type of stuff that gets people through the day.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

The response from an audience gives young people a sense of pride, which helps to build confidence. A large part of the pride that young people felt from their participation in the project came from seeing the reaction of others to their work. Young people we spoke to mentioned receiving positive feedback from audiences, including family members, which made them feel better about themselves. In addition, young people valued the Forum Theatre format whereby the audience discuss the final output at the end. This allows them to hear a wider set of perspectives and further explore some of the scenarios.

“In that space, in that [YOS] building, conversations with adults are about what you’ve done, who you’ve hurt, what the court says, how to improve yourself. This is an opportunity for people to say ‘wow what you’ve done’s brilliant.’” **Bubble staff**

“I liked the fact that everyone spoke about it at the end still, cos they were like ‘what happens if this happened?’, ‘what happens if that happened?’”

Young person • Creative Voices

4.1.3

Creative methods, interaction and fun



Playing games and having interactive discussions makes the sessions fun, which engages the young people. Young people we spoke to commented that they found the sessions lively, entertaining and not boring. This helped them to contribute in discussions and to stay engaged throughout the project. The interactive and informal nature of discussions about different scenarios encourages young people to participate.

“I liked that it was very practical. Because I’m not a big fan of writing things down, I like to do more physical things. Because it’s more exciting, something that I won’t get bored of... I wasn’t exactly staying in one place throughout the whole hour and a half session. I was moving around.” **Young person • Way into Work**

The creative methods allow young people to express themselves in different forms. Young people enjoyed the London Bubble Theatre sessions because they were able to contribute to developing characters and storylines, directing the action, or making music or writing lyrics. The variety of creative methods allowed young people to express themselves on their own terms and explore their own interests and talents. For example, one young person sent music which became the soundtrack for the final film, demonstrating to staff that he had engaged in the process.



Its about changing that space. Moving about, using different levels, using teamwork



“You can like, make up the character’s personality and like the way they are. And see how it affects the story or the plot. [...] It’s creative and it’s productive.” **Young person • Creative Voice**

“One young person was not particularly engaged – late to the first session, and quite detached [...] but then later said ‘can I do music?’ and sent a complete track with lyrics completely relevant to the story we had developed [...] I don’t think anyone has ever done voluntary homework for the group before! It was such a change and shock he was so invested and had retained so much information.” **Bubble facilitator**

The atmosphere which is created also helps to combat negative associations with the Youth Offending Service. The sessions take place within the Southwark YOS building (when not virtual due to Covid-19) and some young people are obligated to take part in the sessions as part of their court order. This can be a challenge for facilitators in terms of engaging young people who come into the sessions feeling as though they don’t want to be there. The highly interactive and fun activities in the session help London Bubble facilitators to engage young people early on and bring the group together, which helps create a safe and collaborative environment for the rest of the project.

“It’s about changing that space, the games allow that. Moving about, using different levels, using teamwork.” **Bubble facilitator**

Young people appear to remember the sessions more because they were creative and they had fun. Young people we spoke to contrasted the activities they did in London Bubble sessions with other activities they do (such as school, or calls with their YOS case managers) and commented that they had more fun with London Bubble Theatre because it was energetic and interactive. They were able to recall the activities they had done. We suggest that young people are more likely to remember what they have learnt in the sessions as a result. The visual and creative methods used in the sessions make it easier for YOS staff to refer back to aspects of the projects in their own work with young people. Their memorability enables continued discussion.



Working together in a group creates a sense of being a part of something. Many young people described the positive atmosphere of the group, in which they felt that people were respectful and supportive of one another. Some young people expressed surprise that this was the case, because it was different from other group settings they found themselves in, or because they didn't expect there to be a positive atmosphere within a group where nobody knew each other. Young people also described feeling as though the pressure was taken off them as individuals due to the group setting; others in the group supported them and sometimes they were able to participate and to learn just by listening to others' opinions.

"It made me feel a part of the group. Like just together, do you know what I mean? I haven't met none of them apart from one and they're just very encouraging and they try to help you. Even if you don't know something. [...] yeah, I felt a part of something. And that we just created something that is something to do with something that is very sensitive at the time." **Young person • Creative Voices**

"It was calmer because everyone was putting in – I didn't have to do everything myself. Or even if I wanted to add points – it was not all on me – there were other people working with me and helping me out" **Young person • Creative Voices**

Group work provided an opportunity to learn about effective communication and collaboration. The facilitated group environment allowed young people to work together effectively to create their final output, allowing them to experience the benefits of collaboration. Young people reported enjoying listening to others' ideas and felt that their final output was better as a result (see communication section in Impact chapter). They felt listened to and that others in the group respected their ideas. For example, some young people commented that they liked it when someone else from the group built on their idea. Young people also commented on how the facilitators were able to let all individuals in the group contribute. This enabled positive social relationships in a group setting to be modelled and practiced². London Bubble facilitators also spoke about the group taking on a self-regulating character, whereby young people themselves would make sure that others in the group were being respectful of one another.

"Yeah, I feel like it was good to have a group because you all have different ideas. If there was one person, there wouldn't be a variety. Because everyone else has their own little story. A lot of other people put in stuff that had happened to them or they might have put in stuff that they've seen happen to a friend. Like I said, you can relate."

Young person • Creative Voices

² This chimes with other evidence documented in the rapid evidence assessment, whereby group-based programmes allowed positive reinforcement, and were able to identify and confront 'attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviour that support offending behaviour' (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003 quoted in Reid, S., and Mendez Sayer, E., 2019)

4.2 Design – Programme and format

4.2.1 Collaborating with stakeholders and creating ‘pathways’



Collaboration across different organisations helps ensure young people get the most out of sessions. London Bubble Theatre work closely with Southwark YOS and feel that this makes a difference to the experience that young people have in the sessions. This includes the way that the projects are explained to young people by their case managers. In addition, whilst London Bubble Theatre doesn’t ask for specific information about the young people’s court orders, information that Southwark YOS can share about their communication needs and their interests (especially for Way into Work) help the facilitators to adapt sessions to take these into account. This maximises the enjoyment and impact for young people.

Pathways between London Bubble Theatre projects and other projects help to achieve longer-term impact. London Bubble Theatre staff are realistic about the impact that their short-term interventions can have on young people. As a result, they see their projects feeding into a wider system of support around young people, including through projects which are offered within Southwark YOS and beyond. Creative Voices was originally designed as an ‘induction’ programme for young people to be referred to at the beginning of their court orders. Some YOS staff spoke about doing this because they felt that it made a difference to young people’s willingness to participate and engage in other groups. London Bubble staff spoke about examples where young people had gone through a Creating Justice project and worked their way up through other opportunities, including into paid work within Youth Ink as Peer Navigators. Some YOS staff commented that they wished there were more projects that London Bubble Theatre could offer to allow them to refer young people onto (see Improvements section).

“When you work with the young people you see that confidence to then take part in other groups with us [Youth Ink]. Looking at groups of young people we get [...] going through London Bubble gave them confidence to then come to us.” **Youth Ink staff member**

In addition, some YOS staff reported using approaches they had seen in the London Bubble Theatre sessions in their own case work. This suggests that the delivery of the programmes themselves (i.e. in addition to specific training sessions) could help to support YOS staff to feel confident using a wider range of creative approaches in their own work.

4.2.2 Near peers



Young people feel they can relate to London Bubble Theatre facilitators. London Bubble Theatre makes a conscious decision to choose facilitators who are ‘near peers’. This means having facilitators who are young (in their twenties), come from similar backgrounds, and who have grown up in the same part of London. This allows facilitators to use terminology and mannerisms that the young people can relate to – and to do so in an authentic way. This (and the fact that they are trained actors) also contributes towards making the characters more relatable when facilitators act out the storylines which the young people have developed. Southwark YOS staff felt that having ‘near peers’ facilitate sessions meant they were better able to understand young people’s day-to-day realities, leading to more honest conversations.

“The [London Bubble Theatre] workers that come to support them, they are very similar to the young people who they work with. In terms of their cultural background, the area where they grew up, so they know pretty much what the young people are having to face. Day in day out. So it’s not somebody from a different part of the country who can’t relate so I guess that plays a part in it. Then the conversations can become more authentic that way.”

YOS staff



We’re still quite clued in on the lingo so it’s quite easy for us to bring that out of them



“A lot of us are quite young... we are all from working class backgrounds. So we kind of get the culture, the mentality. We’ve all gone to comprehensive schools within London that are very mixed and diverse, so we’re still quite clued in on the lingo so it’s quite easy for us to bring that out of them.” **Bubble facilitator**

Young Black male facilitators from London Bubble Theatre allow young people to see adults who look and sound like them doing something positive and taking on a leadership role. Several London Bubble Theatre facilitators are male and Black and this is seen as incredibly important, given that a lot of the young people taking part in these projects through the Southwark YOS are young Black males; part of a population who are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Furthermore, young people are able to witness a positive and professional relationship between young Black men – who are engaging with one another in a lively but respectful way – which facilitators felt that young people might not see in other spaces.

“Representation matters when they are seeing your face – and when the two facilitators are two Black males – seeing that positive relationship between the two young Black male facilitators is something they often don’t see. Seeing us challenge each other and talk things through in a positive safe way... young people don’t always get that opportunity... Seeing yourself represented – where you can then see yourself in the leader – that makes them think like they could do it themselves... It is an opportunity to see themselves reflected in the professionals they are working with.” **Bubble facilitator**

Young people felt that interactions with London Bubble Theatre facilitators felt less formal and conversations were more natural and relaxed. They commented that these interactions were different from interactions they have with other adult professionals and felt better able to connect with the facilitators because they were young and ‘chilled’. Some young people said they felt as if the London Bubble facilitators understood what they had been through and that made it easier for them to talk to each other genuinely.

“They weren’t like teachers, do you feel me like? They’re like normal people. Talking normally innit? They don’t have to speak as if... how should I say? Like staff members, do you feel me? They just talk like you [...] [Bubble staff being] closer to our age worked well. Because you have more things to like, relate to. To like, connect with.”

Young person • Way into Work



London Bubble Theatre take a flexible approach to how sessions are run and are always ready to amend the ‘plan’. There is no set formula for how projects will be run, and consequently sessions can look and feel quite different depending on the cohort in question. They understand that a ‘one size fits all’ approach is not appropriate and that each group of young people they work with will have different needs, preferences and learning styles. Facilitators read young people’s body language and the energy in the room in order to respond in a way that makes young people feel safe, relaxed and engaged.

Southwark YOS appreciate London Bubble Theatre’s flexibility about the structure and timing of the sessions, according to experience with attendance or recruitment. Over the years London Bubble Theatre and the YOS have tested different versions of how the sessions are run in order to see what works. For example they have amended how many sessions they run, or how far apart the sessions are scheduled, or how many young people are recruited. This flexibility is seen as crucial by the YOS when working with this group of young people. YOS staff also appreciate that young people are still able to attend remaining sessions if they miss a session. The lives of many of these young people can be chaotic and therefore having that flexibility is important.

“There were times where it almost got stopped because we were just struggling with numbers of the young people. I think we chopped and changed a lot of things in the past, to try and see what works. And I think it’s ever-changing so... I think it’s important to just keep it as dynamic as possible really. Keep it as adaptive as possible. To meet the young people’s needs... Keep it always moving and progressing.” **YOS staff**

4.3

Culture and ethos

4.3.1

Youth-led and person-centred



London Bubble Theatre staff work hard to find different ways in which each young person will feel comfortable to engage and contribute. Facilitators spoke about how they do not force anyone to act or even speak and that this is important because these young people are often being told what to do in other settings. In a London Bubble session they decide how to contribute and what story to tell. This necessitates being patient and giving young people the time and space to engage on their own terms. Both London Bubble and Southwark YOS staff shared experiences of wondering whether a particular young person was paying attention and then being surprised when they did engage and demonstrated that they were listening the whole time.

“A lot of young people here are constantly being asked to do things in the adult world. In this space [...] we are not asking for much and not forcing you to do anything [...] It is so important to understand that not all young people communicate in the same way – and find out how to reach them in their preferred format, whether that be writing, speaking, directing, or producing.” **Bubble facilitator**

Young people felt that no matter how they had engaged, they had made valuable contributions. Young people appreciate not being forced to contribute in a certain way and being able to take part in a way that they are comfortable with. Even if they weren't being asked to act, facilitators still made an effort to get everyone involved and to give each young person the space and time to input in their own way. In particular, young people felt as if they were always being asked their opinions (whether that was towards a play or film in Creative Voices, or towards discussions and role playing in Way into Work) and this helped them to feel their contributions were valued.

“Even if you don't really want to be that character you can still put into that character. And help build that character... we felt a lot more involved. Because each of us like... every single character and everything they've done we've all put into it... And that makes us feel a lot better, innit.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

“I didn't feel pressured or anything...They weren't rushing everyone to reply like. If you took a while to reply they would skip you, they wouldn't like, focus on that one person. When you did talk they would take their time. Like if you was stuttering, or you was stuck on something, they would wait 'til when you're ready.” **Young person • Way into Work**

Putting the young person's voice at the centre of everything is key to how sessions are run. Facilitators work hard to make a young person feel seen and heard. London Bubble staff described a key aim of their sessions as showing 'unconditional positive regard' for each young person. This can be by asking questions, referring to a comment a young person previously made, or saying something that lets a young person know they have been listening. The intention is to let young people know that they matter.

“In therapeutic terms it is the concept of attunement and being held in mind. A young person may not think they matter or are significant – but if week by week we hold their ideas, or remember something they contributed or said, or comment on something about them that shows we haven't forgotten and that we remember – that can be very healing for young people.” **Bubble staff**

“They [Bubble staff] try to kind of, adapt to those young people that they work with as much as possible and kind of, try to listen to them and see what they want out of that program.” **YOS staff**



It makes you feel like more wanted and more respected in the group



Young people are the creators, writers and directors, which gives them a sense of real ownership over the project. For Creative Voices, London Bubble Theatre and Southwark YOS staff spoke about the importance of letting young people choose and develop their own characters, storylines and dialogue. They are completely in charge of where the story goes. This gives young people a voice and a sense of being listened to. In Way into Work, the stories that are used to discuss the pressures and considerations of finding work are person centred. Where possible they speak with Southwark YOS, who share information about the young people so that they can develop the scenarios based on the interests of young people in the group. Young people themselves appreciated not being told what to discuss or what topics to focus on, and felt that their ideas were taken on board. One young person commented that he expected to have to talk about knife crime and gangs, because he felt as if young people like him were always given those labels. He appreciated finding out this was not the case, and that they were able to develop the story and characters however they wanted. This contributed to young people feeling more able to relate to the characters that were developed.

“Even like in drama at my school.. It’s like someone tells me I have to do this or I have to do that innit. I didn’t wanna have to read from a script and all that as well. I don’t really like acting but I’ll do it now. I liked it [Creative Voices] better because I can create my own character. Obviously, what I say is what I say innit like no one is telling me what to say...if someone just gives me something and says you have to run with that like, it wouldn’t be the same innit. Like when you actually know that, ‘OK yeah I’ve actually done something to make this character and to help the group’, then it makes you feel like more wanted and more respected in the group, innit... [and] it helps you feel at one with the character.”

Young person • Creative Voices

“I liked the fact that we got to build our own character... ‘cos it’s not always based off crime is it, you could build a person and make it something completely different it doesn’t have to do with like knives and gangs, doesn’t have to have that category there. If I’ve been arrested they label it as gang related it’s not always that case.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

4.3.2

Unshockable/non judgemental



London Bubble Theatre create accepting and safe spaces where young people do not feel judged or labelled. As a rule all labels are ‘left at the door’ so that no one is labelled as an offender or a trouble maker, and everyone is treated as an equal participant. This also includes any London Bubble Theatre or Southwark YOS staff present, so that everyone in the room is expected to respect everyone else and follow the same rules. This is particularly important given the sessions are run at the YOS, in order to give young people the opportunity to view their engagement as somewhat separate from the circumstances of their court order.

“Like other teachers, like say a teacher at school, they know who I am and what I’m doing innit. They’re just biased innit and I’m thinking like, they’re just always going to think ‘Oh, don’t really listen to him’, But like, they [London Bubble] know about YOT. But they still treat me with respect and like talk to me in a nice way.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

London Bubble Theatre staff spoke about the importance of creating spaces where young people could talk about sensitive topics with trusted adults. Facilitators therefore stressed the need to appear un-shockable in order to allow difficult conversations with young people to take place – whether that is about relationships, sex, drugs, abuse or mental

health. Southwark YOS staff commended London Bubble for the way they respond to young people if they say something extreme or inappropriate. Rather than shutting down or judging young people for what they say, they address comments head on and invite them to discuss it more, whilst also diverting the group away from using offensive language. This approach allows the group to discuss and delve deeper into important issues, and gives facilitators the opportunity to challenge young people respectfully and offer alternative perspectives. In fact, staff noted that a lot of the ‘challenge’ can often come from other young people themselves. Because young people are not shut down, they are then more likely to consider hearing another perspective or even change their mind.

“One young person, all he was into was [talking about] sex and rape and gang banging. That’s all he would be speaking about. So the way she [London Bubble facilitator] kind of diverted away from that, but didn’t ignore him, and brought it into the character – you have to be so skilled to be able to do that, because I was getting quite angry to be honest.”

YOS staff

“Rather than being ‘told off’ or having things called out, they are just presented with another opinion or a question which makes them think about what they’ve said... Because we didn’t fight them. We didn’t make them feel inferior, they were just thinking “maybe that isn’t the wisest thing to do!” **Bubble facilitator**

4.3.3



Pro-social modelling

London Bubble Theatre facilitators model the behaviours they ask young people to exhibit in return. London Bubble sessions are always run by at least two facilitators. Staff spoke about how this works well in terms of modelling good behaviour (mutual respect, turn taking, listening, positive interaction). The facilitators will always have lively debates with one another – modelling a safe and respectful way to communicate, even when in disagreement. Facilitators see this as helping young people feel comfortable to do the same.

Young people felt that the way facilitators behaved set the tone and encouraged all the young people to behave in a similar way. Multiple young people commented that London Bubble staff were kind, respectful, calm and communicated in a friendly and welcoming way. They felt that this encouraged everyone in the ‘room’ to mirror those behaviours. London Bubble Theatre staff also made young people feel listened to, which in turn encouraged them to listen to staff and other young people in the group. This led to an overall atmosphere that young people often described as being calm, welcoming and positive.

“They’ll [Bubble staff] speak to us how they would want to be spoken to as well. Do you feel me? Like, they will speak to us in a respectful manner for us to then speak to them in a respectful manner.” **Young person • Way into Work**

“They didn’t have to tell anyone to be quiet or anything [...] No one really criticised anyone about anything. A hundred percent [different from school] because in school, someone’s always got something to say because in school it’s just immature really [...] It made me feel respected [...] Because in the classroom when you speak you might get spoken over by someone, one of your friends or something. [At London Bubble] I didn’t know anyone that was there. But yet I still showed them respect. And everyone showed me respect.”

Young person • Way into Work



London Bubble Theatre manages behaviour based on expectations of mutual trust and respect – rather than a more traditional and hierarchical approach. This relies upon creating a space where everyone is equal and addressing the inherent power imbalances between staff and young people. The focus is therefore on exhibiting behaviours they want young people to mirror – upon a foundation where everyone is treated equally. Rather than being seen as figures of authority who hold all the power (as young people often described other adults), they put themselves on the same level as the young people. For example, in every game, activity or discussion, young people are never asked to do something that the facilitators would not do themselves. Co-facilitators also use playfulness, laughter and banter with each other in order to remove any preconceptions around authority. These approaches had a big impact on young people’s willingness to engage with the project, and could help to build up their sense of self-worth.

“They was respectful. If you say something they won’t just be like ‘ah no, we’re not doing that’, they would give it a chance innit. 100% different [from other adults]. Adults think that they should always be in charge innit like. People younger than them don’t have a say innit. So it’s what I like about this. Obviously when people tell me what to do innit and they make me feel like I’m nothing innit like I’m just a little kid and that... If they was treating me like that, then I wouldn’t really wanna do it innit.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

London Bubble facilitators accept that young people will push boundaries to start with. Despite this, they persist with a behaviour management approach that focuses on mutual trust and respect and never revert back to a more traditional disciplinary approach. By responding consistently in this way, facilitators spoke about feeling as though they pass ‘a test’ set by young people, and further gain their trust. Consequently young people then tend to engage more meaningfully. YOS staff also referred to the effective way in which London Bubble facilitators challenge inappropriate or disrespectful behaviour. For example, when a young person is being rude to another young person London Bubble staff step in and firmly challenge that behaviour – but in a way that does not make too big a deal out of the situation or embarrass and shame the young person being challenged.

“In terms of [Bubble staff] challenging them [the young people], they challenge them in a way that they don’t feel victimized, they don’t feel hard done by.”
YOS staff

Key to icons

Throughout the evaluation, we found that specific ways of working were associated with achieving specific impacts. The following icons representing ways of working are found throughout the subsequent 'Impacts' section to draw out these connections.



Use of characters,
stories and props



Flexibility



Final product



Youth led and
person centred



Creative methods,
interaction and fun



Unshockable/non
judgemental



Group work



Pro-social
modelling



Collaborating with
stakeholders and
creating 'pathways'



Behaviour
management



Near peers

“

It's maybe years down the line that they'll come and say 'Oh, that thing you said to me', really kind of changed the trajectory of my life

”

5.0
Impact



5.0

Impact

5.1

Introduction and Theory of Change

The young people we spoke to varied in their opinions about the impact they felt the Creating Justice projects had on them. This is to be expected, as young people are starting off in different places and are not therefore expected to experience the projects in the same way. The interviews with young people reflected this and there was not always conformity in what they had to say. In any particular area one young person might have described great positive impact, whilst another young person might have said there was no impact at all.

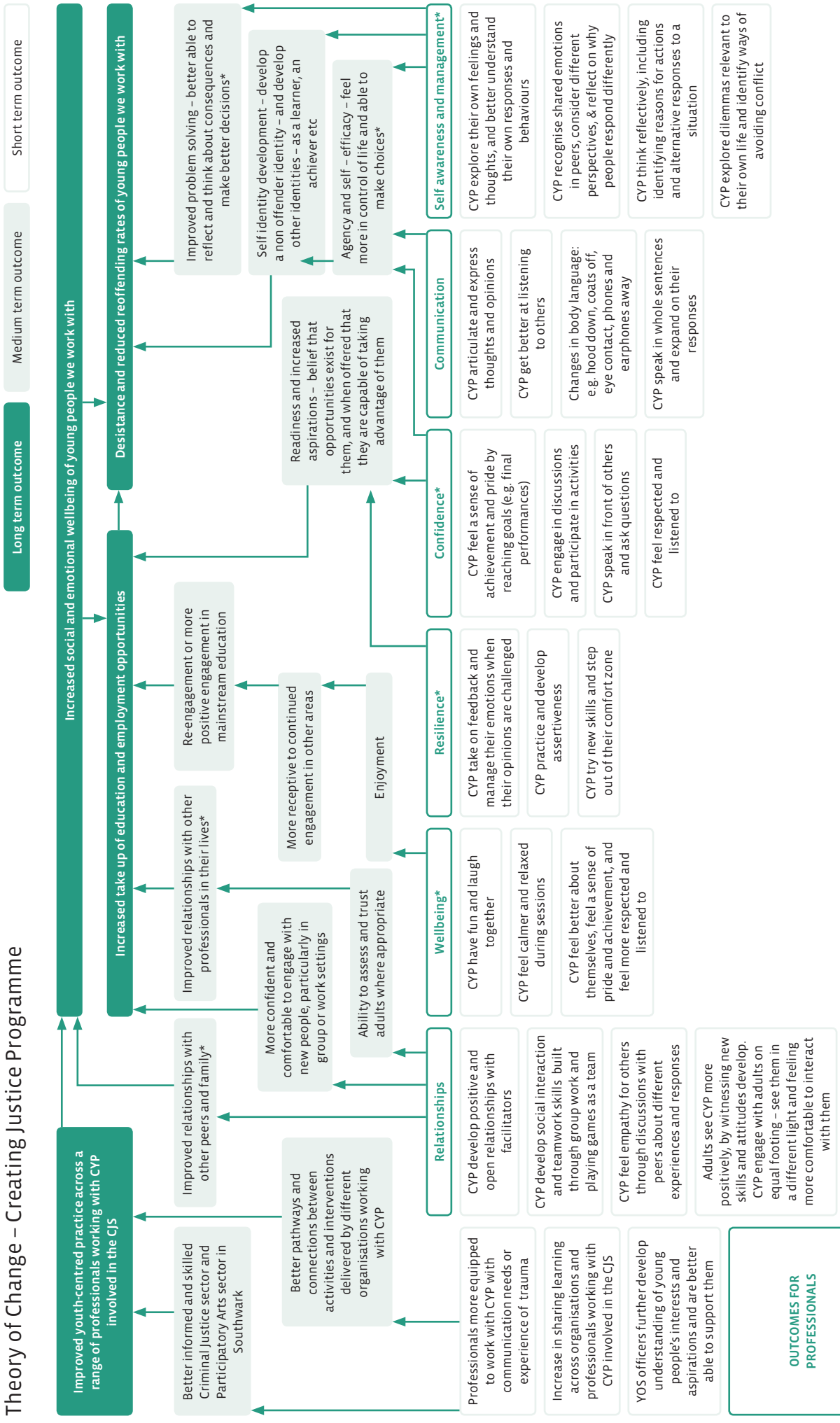
There was an acknowledgement from the outset by London Bubble Theatre and Southwark YOS staff that the impacts that could be expected from a time-limited intervention such as Creative Voices and Way into Work were modest and small-scale. Furthermore, these projects cannot be stand-alone interventions, but instead must form part of a wider ongoing range of interventions delivered by different agencies and organisations in each young person's life. These London Bubble Theatre projects were therefore seen as being able to build on what has come before, as well as lay the groundwork to help young people engage and take up the next opportunity.

Related to this, Southwark YOS staff noted that young people are referred to several interventions during their time with the YOS so it can be hard to attribute impact to any one intervention alone. Furthermore, the impact is not always immediate – and sometimes it can take years for impact to become evident.

“Sometimes it's hard with this work we do, to see results straight away or sometimes you may not even think you've made any difference in your interventions. But it's maybe years down the line that they'll come and say 'Oh, that thing you said to me', really kind of changed the trajectory of my life really. So, it's really hard to evidence short term hard outcomes from interventions.” **YOS staff**

The model on the following page, developed initially in the Theory of Change workshop held at the start and revised throughout the evaluation, illustrates the main short, medium and long term outcomes of the Creating Justice Programme. The rest of the chapter outlines the key findings for each.

Theory of Change – Creating Justice Programme



* Resilience in the longer term is made up of a combination of factors, which are indicated across different areas of the model using an asterisk

5.2 Short term impacts

5.2.1 Resilience

Resilience can be a contested term, as some feel that a focus on resilience places the burden on young people to cope with adversity, rather than focusing on reducing the adversity young people face in the first place. Resilience is highly context-dependent, with studies showing that those with adverse childhood experiences and/or trauma have fewer resources with which to face adversity and challenges³. Important external factors, such as social support, financial resources and freedom from discrimination are also important parts of allowing people to ‘bounce back’ from adversity.

In the context of this evaluation, we talked about resilience in a number of different ways including:

- Building capabilities in young people to help them ‘bounce back’ from facing adversity (and the challenges of trying to do this through one intervention);
- Helping young people to deal with potentially stressful or risky situations and to control their own responses, such as when their behaviour is challenged;
- As a combination of ‘protective factors’ – some of which are discussed in other impact areas of this report such as: self-awareness and self-management; agency; and improved problem solving.

Some members of Southwark YOS felt that ‘resilience to bounce back from adversity’ was about small steps that accumulate, such as developing trusting relationships and raising aspirations. However, London Bubble Theatre were cautious about what can be achieved in the course of a short intervention, particularly for these young people who continue to face adversity in their lives.

“Our relationships at London Bubble with young people [are] not as long as what YouthInk or [Southwark] YOS can get. Also young people’s adverse experiences are still happening while they take part in London Bubble – and after – so we need the good stuff to be coming at them in waves as well. I think London Bubble can do a little but [...] there needs to be a wave of stuff coming to young people to help build up their resilience in an ongoing way – and that needs to come from a range of organisations across [different] sectors”

Bubble staff

Some young people felt that the use of different scenarios in London Bubble Theatre sessions helped them reflect on how they responded when challenged. Some young people felt that they had a tendency to react badly, or overreact when their behaviour was challenged. Through the sessions they were able to see how the way that characters’ responded to situations affected how the situation developed. They weren’t always sure how well they would be able to translate this learning to real-life situations outside of the sessions. Some young people commented on how those within the group often held differing or opposing views, but yet it felt like a safe space in which to practice getting their views across assertively and amicably (as well as listening to others).

“I don’t respond well to being challenged. But I liked that the other people in the group we are all giving different ideas innit and those ideas might cross sometimes innit, so you get your responses being challenged – but it’s kind of helpful innit. And it makes you learn to make your points stronger and stronger. It felt safe to do that. It’s not like disagreeing is going to get you killed. And people were still listening even if they disagreed. There was no arguing about any of the points.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

³ Public Health England report that ‘those who face the most adversity are least likely to have the resources necessary to build resilience’ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/355766/Review2_Resilience_in_schools_health_inequalities.pdf

Young people were able to step out of their comfort zone, whilst knowing that it was a safe space within which to take a risk. Staff therefore felt that the London Bubble Theatre sessions provided young people with an appropriate level of challenge. Way into Work includes activities that help push young people outside their comfort zone and challenges them to overcome their fears. For example, visiting a professional office means that they have to speak to new people and doing a mock interview shows them that they can cope with being put on the spot.

Particular 'Ways of Working' that led to this impact



5.2.2

Confidence

Young people felt they had increased their confidence to take part and to speak up over the course of their engagement, especially in a group setting. This confidence was one of the main reported impacts by both young people and staff working with them. Young people attributed this to having had such a positive experience of taking part in the London Bubble sessions. Much of this was because they had explicitly received positive feedback from facilitators (and sometimes from their peers in the group). Having felt listened to and respected by the staff and their peers was also a key contributing factor, as this helped young people to feel that their opinions were valuable and gave them more of a voice.

“It helped me with confidence and also I know that I can give valid points as well. I’m not just talking rubbish innit. I’m actually giving valid points.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

In addition to this, a feeling of achievement further raised young people’s confidence. They could see their ideas in the final film or play and the fact that this was something that they had achieved in a project over six weeks raised their aspirations and made them feel more confident in their abilities.

“Yeah, it’s changed the way I do think about myself. [...] Because I haven’t done an activity for a very long time. When I did that activity I just felt more accomplished, like I’d just done something [...] I can see my ideas inside the movie, so that’s how you also know you are listened to.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

“My reflections on coming along to presentations [the final play], it’s basic things like young people smiling at the end and looking like they are proud of achieving something – but also maybe embarrassed of doing something that everyone is saying ‘wow, how amazing?’ maybe because they haven’t heard that before. [...] To have an audience and adults applauding them – they feel proud of something they have achieved.” **YOS staff**

Linked to this, young people were able to identify experiences and skills which they already had and this gave them a sense of optimism about how they could use and further develop in the future. This was a particularly important outcome from the Way into Work project, where identifying transferable skills that the young people had gave them confidence about going into job interviews.

Most young people reported improved confidence as a change for themselves, from the first session to the last session. One young person felt they were already confident so it didn't make so much difference on this point, highlighting the importance of identifying individual starting points when measuring impact (as in the star diagram process).

Some young people felt that this increased confidence would last beyond the immediate after-effects of the sessions. They reported that they felt more confident to do other things and take part in other groups (see 'Engagement with new things' section). This included young people whose confidence came from feeling that they now had a plan to take into other situations, such as job interviews.

There was scepticism from one professional about young people being able to take this confidence into another group setting, because they felt that a key reason allowing young people to speak up in the group is the environment that London Bubble Theatre creates – and not all groups can be expected to be like that. This professional therefore felt that young people would be likely instead to 'shut down' a bit as they figured out the new group environment. However, one staff member from Southwark YOS gave the example of a young person with learning needs who was very shy. He had engaged with the London Bubble sessions and YOS staff had since observed him being more confident to interact in other YOS group settings, including an occasion where he unexpectedly introduced himself and instigated conversations.

"He knew none of them. He's the one who went up and said hello to everybody and they all started talking to each other. So he instigated that [...] whether he knowingly did that or not, the fact that we saw it. And it's something that he would have not done before."

YOS staff

Particular 'Ways of Working' that led to this impact



5.2.3

Communication

Many of the young people attending London Bubble Theatre sessions have speech, language and communication needs and it is part of the Southwark YOS process for each young person to see a Speech and Language Therapist (SALT) worker when they start their court orders. London Bubble therefore runs sessions flexibly to allow young people to participate according to their needs. They also run training sessions on speech, language and communication needs, using theatre techniques, for a range of professionals who work with young people. As well as ensuring all young people can participate fully in the sessions, improving communication is an important desired outcome for the Creating Justice projects.

Young people reported getting enjoyment out of being able to articulate themselves and get their points across in the sessions, as well as be understood. One young person said they felt that they had improved their communication abilities because they were able to have lots of practice in the sessions when putting their ideas across in the small group. In addition, young people found it helpful that facilitators gave them the time to articulate themselves and ensured they had understood what was meant, before moving on to other members of the group.

Young people also frequently reported feeling they had got better at listening to other people. Although some young people felt they were already good at this upon going into the session, others admitted that they were not so good at listening and so felt that the sessions had made a big impact on this. Through the sessions, young people have to work together to create a storyline (Creative Voices) or deconstruct Duane’s story (Way into Work) and suggest ideas – and this experience (which some young people had not had for a long time, because they were not in mainstream education) allowed them to better appreciate the value of listening to other people’s ideas. They recognised that this allowed them to reflect on their own thoughts and improve their own ideas. With Creative Voices, they felt that the finished film was better as a result of this collaboration with others.

“Yeah I definitely started listening more. When I first came I wasn’t really... I was a kid that didn’t listen, so I kind of like to listen to other people’s points now, ‘ok cool that’s interesting’ and I can kind of change my point and adapt it to be better.”

Young person • Creative Voices

“Because I actually like, it helped. I had an idea and they said their idea and I said like, I could build on their idea, kind of. [...] It would help me to be honest like. Instead of just having that one opinion that I think... If I listened to someone and see if they had a better idea. An idea that would then make mine good as well.” **Young person • Way into Work**

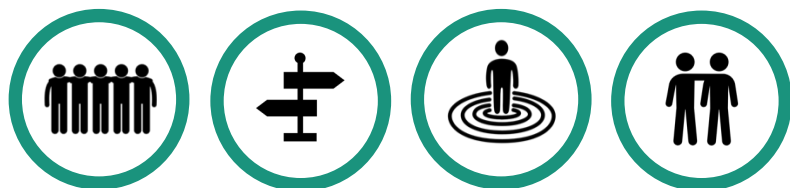
Part of what made this effective in the sessions was **the facilitators modelling turn-taking, and allowing everyone to contribute.** One young person juxtaposed this with the type of communication they were used to, including in school where ‘everybody just shouts at each other’.

Way into Work also gives young people the opportunity to learn and practise professional communication and understand how body language affects how you are perceived. One young person also reported that facilitators encouraged them all to expand on their answers, an important communication skill in the workplace, and especially for performing well in job interviews.

“They showed me a little movie. It was a movie clip. The actor who runs the program. And, in the little movie clip he was being arrogant, he was speaking like how I’m talking now and like, stuff like that. It’s little things, and like it shows a whole lot more when you just move correct.” **Young Person • Way into Work**

One young person interviewed for the evaluation found that taking part in Way into Work had helped him to find strategies to deal with the frustration around communication that he felt as a result of having a stutter. Facilitators were patient and gently motivated him to articulate himself. They encouraged him to take his time, which he found helped him not to feel so agitated and frustrated about not being able to find the right word.

Particular ‘Ways of Working’ that led to this impact



Young people spoke about feeling better about themselves because of the reactions they received to things they said in the sessions. Positive responses led to an increase in confidence and wellbeing. For young people taking part in Creative Voices, this feeling was further reinforced by the positive reactions from other adults who attend the final performance. Young people felt more respected and listened to by London Bubble staff (and other young people), which also contributed to feeling better about themselves. They talked about enjoying the chance to be heard and having a platform where one was being invited to share one's ideas and opinions. Young people spoke about how different this felt to most scenarios they were in. Young people also said they felt as if they had achieved something – whether through the creation of an output (play or film) – or what they had learnt (like interview skills), which made them feel proud.

“I like answering questions. And getting stuff right. And inputting. That was just my fun in the sessions really.” **Young person • Creative Voices**



I know I have achieved something now



“People shaking my hand at the end [of the final performance] and saying you done well. That’s why I feel respected... that final session when the audience came, we didn’t know what they were going to think – but after I was like I know I have achieved something now.”

Young person • Creative Voices

Young people felt the sessions provided them with a temporary respite from normal life. They referred to the sessions as a sort of getaway where they had the opportunity to do something fun and have a laugh – which they didn't get much chance to do elsewhere. Young people referred to the sessions as being able to put them in a better mood, or allowing them to feel calm or to concentrate. However, young people did talk about how these feelings of wellbeing would not always last and that they then had to return ‘to reality’. Despite these feelings being described as fleeting – young people still valued the opportunity to relax, laugh and have fun.

Southwark YOS staff echoed these sentiments and referred to London Bubble sessions in the same way. They saw it as an opportunity to feel good in the moment and to be involved in a positive experience for a short while, often when the rest of their lives could be incredibly chaotic.

“It could just be a one hour little escape. Do you know what I mean? To create something, that at the end was very good.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

“When I come here I have a laugh and I don’t usually have a laugh out there... I still have to carry on with my daily life. It’s just a session like you can refer to. Obviously I’m in a good mood innit but I still have to go back to reality.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

Enjoying the sessions and having fun is an important wellbeing outcome in itself. The professionals we spoke with felt that giving young people the opportunity to relax and enjoy themselves with others was an essential part of what London Bubble Theatre projects provide. Facilitators highlighted the important role that creativity and games played in getting young people to be silly, playful and light-hearted for the few hours that they are taking part in a session. Southwark YOS staff said that some young people describe the sessions as being fun, and that even those who are reluctant to admit it have obviously enjoyed themselves. Over the duration of a project, facilitators spoke about observing small changes that indicate young people are having fun and feeling more relaxed. This includes seeing young people smile more, laugh, and levels of interest

and engagement increase. Having observed the London Bubble sessions, YOS staff describe how light-hearted and fun the sessions are, as well as how much laughing and joking around takes place.

“I’d say the energy is probably the best thing. It’s probably that they [facilitators] come with a lot of energy. Very positive, very uplifting for young people. In a space where they can feel confident in expressing that. Whereas they may not have that in other settings, to express that kind of energy and emotions in that way.” **YOS staff**

“Most of the time young people say it’s quite fun. For the young people it just seems like it’s a fun game, you know. Laughing, most of the time, there’s a lot of laughing in the sessions. It’s like you know, they make it more light hearted, at times. It does get intense [...] but then they always kind of, de-stress or decompress at the end. And then play another game to kind of lighten it up.” **YOS staff**

The sessions are an opportunity for young people to be ‘praised, accepted, and responded to with curiosity and empathy’ – which London Bubble Theatre facilitators observed as leading to a sense of pride for young people. Southwark YOS staff, when asked about the impact of the sessions on wellbeing – also spoke about young people feeling heard and valued, as well as feeling proud of what they are achieving and creating. This can feel all the more significant for young people given that for many they are not getting a sense of achievement, or feeling valued or heard, elsewhere in their lives. YOS staff also reflected on how the sessions can be mentally stimulating – which can have a positive impact on wellbeing.

Some young people who took part in Way into Work spoke about consequently feeling less stressed about their future or more confident about their future prospects. For example one young person said he felt less stressed because he had more of a sense of what he wanted to do and how to get himself there. Another young person said they felt better about themselves because the Way into Work mock interview had made them feel more confident about successfully taking part in an interview and getting a job.

“I feel better because like, [mock interviews] makes it seem like it’s a real interview, innit. So if I was going to show that same energy in a real interview then I would most likely get it.” **Young person • Way into Work**

Particular ‘Ways of Working’ that led to this impact



London Bubble Theatre sessions provide a unique opportunity for young people to interact with adults on an equal footing. One facilitator noted that many of the young people they work with experience interactions with adults as one-sided, often involving being told off or being told what to do. This can lead to young people feeling as if they are constantly being spoken down to, which can make them feel insecure. In contrast, one Southwark YOS staff commented on how London Bubble staff are able to build good relationships with the young people very quickly by ‘finding common ground and being able to have a laugh’. They saw this as key to securing young people’s interest and willingness to engage. Furthermore, other adults (such as Southwark YOS staff) are expected to take part in the games and activities. This creates opportunities to interact with adults, traditionally in positions of authority, in a different way. This atmosphere means that young people can see adults in a different light, understand more about them and feel more comfortable to go up and speak to them.

Young people did not describe their interactions with London Bubble Theatre staff as having led to the development of a long-lasting trusting relationship, because they would only have met them a handful of times and always in a group setting. However, most young people described their interactions with staff as being incredibly positive, often saying that staff treated them with kindness and respect and were good listeners. Some young people also mentioned that the facilitators gave them useful advice. They also sometimes differentiated the way London Bubble staff treated and spoke to them to how other adults would speak to them, particularly teachers.

“[Bubble staff talk to us] not in a rude way, they give us advice innit – they have respect innit. They’re able to listen to you and there’s respect there.”

Young person • Creative Voices

Young people appreciate being in a space where everyone could get along and be kind and respectful to one another. Some said this was an unfamiliar experience and that they had no other spaces in their life where that would happen. Often meeting new people meant having to be cautious and in ‘defence mode’, always on edge in case conflict arose. London Bubble Theatre sessions were therefore a welcome reprieve – a safe space where young people felt as if they could engage with other young people in a calm and relaxed way. And whilst they weren’t necessarily creating long lasting relationships with the other young people in the room, some said they were gaining confidence to speak to new people outside of the sessions. Others were more cautious about the impact this could have on their relationships in the outside world because London Bubble is “a whole different world where nobody knows each other and nobody is judging you”.

“It was calm. If you’re going to be calm I’ll be calm. So I didn’t mind working with other people... I don’t really interact with people like that, if I am going to interact with people it’s like an issue but no one here was like on a bad vibes if you understand what I’m saying so that was calm. Always felt really chilled. There’s no negativity, it’s just a calm atmosphere, there’s no issue.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

Southwark YOS staff noted that young people who had never met each other before were engaging positively with one another in London Bubble sessions. They felt that of all the group activities that young people engage with through the YOS, London Bubble Theatre sessions are where they tend to work best with others. YOS and London Bubble staff observed instances of young people stepping in and supporting each other when they were struggling – for example during the mock interviews. Echoing what young people had said, YOS staff also noticed that the way young people responded to meeting new people in the London Bubble session felt different from the norm.

Being able to hear different responses and opinions from other young people in the group made young people appreciate that everyone comes with a different life experience and a different perspective – and that this was a positive thing. One young person mentioned learning ‘not to judge a book by its cover’ because you never knew what might be going on in someone’s life. It also made some young people think more about how people might feel in response to a situation or experience, and to reflect on how one should treat others.

“Everyone goes through different things so not everyone’s the same innit. Everyone said a different opinion, no one really appeared to think the same thing so... we’re all different. No one’s the same. And it’s supposed to be like that.”

Young person • Way into Work

“The project like, just made me think like, don’t take everything for granted, innit. Jayden [a character within the storyline], he was being rude to his mum and that, innit. But you can’t be doing that. You can’t be rude to your mum. It’s unacceptable. I would never do that.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

Southwark YOS staff felt that young people’s engagement with London Bubble Theatre sessions could have a positive impact on their own relationship with them, even if in general they felt that their relationships with the young people were already good. For example, if the young person had a positive experience, it could lead to them trusting their YOS staff more, particularly in relation to other projects or initiatives the YOS staff might suggest they engage with. It also gave the YOS staff an opportunity to celebrate a young person’s achievement and demonstrate how proud and impressed they were. The sessions could give the YOS staff insights into the young person’s life, because they felt that the characters and storylines they create are reflections of themselves and what’s going on around them. YOS staff gave examples of being able to refer to some of the storylines and topics that emerged from London Bubble sessions to have discussions with the young person later on. London Bubble staff also reflected on how when YOS staff sit in on a session, they are expected to engage in activities and games also. This gives young people an opportunity to engage with those YOS staff in a more light-hearted way and observe them laughing and being silly, which can strengthen a relationship.

“With my recent young person, because of all the other stuff that’s going on for him, I was just so chuffed and impressed with him that he was turning up at all and so I was sending him messages – I’d say “You in? You in? You joined?” and he’d say “Yeah, I’m in, I’m in! I’m even acting” and then I would send like loads of really positive emojis and say like “Oh you know, I’m so pleased!”. I guess it gives that opportunity to have a really positive interaction.” **YOS staff**

“Small wins [from engaging with London Bubble] are big gains for building our relationships with young people and allowing us to do other work with them or support them for whatever else is going on for them at the time.” **YOS staff**

Improved relationships in the medium and longer term

Some young people spoke about how their experience with London Bubble might make it **easier for them to ask other adults or professionals for help or advice in the future**. They were now more willing to believe that some good could come out of reaching out. In particular, they saw the value in seeking out other perspectives and ideas on how to address a problem they might have. There was a strong caveat in that young people said this would depend on how other adults and professionals treated them. They would have to trust those adults would treat them with respect and kindness, just as London

Bubble staff had. They were not always confident or hopeful this would be the case.

"I probably would [be more likely to ask for advice or help from others] now. London Bubble staff – I feel like I could talk to them, if I wanted to talk to them about something. And hopefully I could bring that to other people innit. But it depends on how the people are. Because like not everyone's the same as them and they don't really act the same as them. But if I believed I could actually trust someone and they're actually nice, then yeah, definitely. Because I know if there's something I have in my head innit, before I'm just thinking like "no one else will understand, like there's no point me going to them or anything". But like now I know like, if I go to them, they can actually like bring an aspect I didn't think about, innit... Like now I realise that everyone has different points of views, innit. And like they all... everyone can chip in. Everyone can like, make a valid point. And I think that's helpful."

Young person • Creative Voices

London Bubble facilitators and Southwark YOS staff noted the **changes in how young people related to one another in the group, including how they learnt to disagree and debate with one another in a respectful and amiable way**. YOS staff were cautious about presuming that young people would be able to take these skills and use them to resolve disagreements without conflict in the outside world. Some young people spoke about how the London Bubble sessions might help them improve existing relationships due to having learnt how to be better listeners. They thought that learning to listen to others could help prevent arguments with family or lead to developing closer friendships.

Some young people said the experience of **working positively within a group made them feel more confident and comfortable about the prospect of working with others in a group setting in the future**. Others commented on how it would impact the way they interacted and communicated with people they meet for the first time. For example they felt more able to have respectful social interactions with strangers or communicate more positively with colleagues when starting a new job.

"It might change just the way I act around strangers innit. Like for example, let's say you're working now. You're going to have to work with strangers. You're literally going to have to like, communicate with them. Yeah so, it would change the way I think about acting. Like my personality, you know like my body language around strangers."

Young person • Creative Voices

There were a few examples of how **taking part in London Bubble sessions impacted upon existing relationships that young people had**. One young person spoke about how it had a positive impact on his relationship with his mum. She was supportive of his engagement in the project and he felt it raised both of their spirits when he took part. A YOS worker referred to the impact it had on a young person to have his father (with whom he had an 'on-off' relationship) attend the final performance for Creative Voices. It meant a lot to have his father support him in that way and it gave the father an in-road to have a constructive conversation with his son later on.

Particular 'Ways of Working' that led to this impact



Self-awareness and management

London Bubble Theatre design the projects in a way that deliberately prompts young people to explore how they might feel in a certain situation, and to then think about how they should act or respond. Both London Bubble and Southwark YOS staff described the different ways in which the sessions were able to do this so effectively:

- The storytelling or role playing activities ask young people to give their input and advice as well as make decisions about what should happen next. Effectively **young people are given responsibility and are put into a position of authority** to decide each character's fate and as such are in control of the storyline, which is both empowering and self-reflective.
- **London Bubble sessions give young people the opportunity to reflect on scenarios they can relate to.** YOS staff assert that because the scenarios are very 'realistic', young people are able to draw from their own life experiences when developing a story or character. It therefore prompts young people to discuss important and relevant topics and apply any learning to their own lives.
- London Bubble and YOS staff felt that whilst the content is relatable, the fact that they are spoken about hypothetically through fictional characters and scenarios makes it a safe space to discuss the topics that emerge. **Young people therefore get to explore dilemmas relevant to their own lives in a safe environment.**
- The London Bubble sessions are **an opportunity for young people to recognise shared emotions in their peers.** Facilitators and YOS workers both observed that young people were learning from their peers about how to make better decisions and were now more able to understand a dilemma from several different perspectives. Such communication is based on mutual experience, with each young person more likely to internalise the 'learning' when it comes from a peer they recognise as having had similar experiences.

"[The activities] give them independence as well. Not just independence, responsibility. Because when they've giving feedback and they're giving advice on what the character can do, in a way they are helping mould a person's chances of success. I think they quite like that." **Bubble staff**

"The characters that we create in the Creative Voices are so relevant to everyday lived experiences young people are going through [...] They know someone's gone through that even if it's not them. And I think for them to be able to think about that and relate it back to themselves [...] to give them different scenarios which they might not have thought about, you know, for example, you know, one of the characters last time was like, it's your best friend who's got the gun, what do you do? He's a drug dealer, what do you do? So all those scenarios." **YOS staff**

The sessions help young people understand themselves and their own responses better.

London Bubble facilitators reflected on how the responses young people give to questions of how they would act in a specific scenario can change over time. They observe the young people constantly processing and re-evaluating their own perspectives. YOS staff spoke about how the very lively discussions had in sessions are incredibly thought-provoking and manage to get young people to really think about things. Furthermore, the London Bubble sessions were getting young people to explore the range of ways in which they can manage different emotions and respond accordingly.

Southwark YOS staff also commented on how the discussions being had in the **London Bubble sessions can provide a way for officers to continue particular conversations with a young person.** It provides staff with an easier way to create ongoing spaces for reflection with a young person. This included an example where a young person's engagement in the session was improved after conversations with their YOS staff about inappropriate remarks they had made in the session. They were able to reflect on how they had come across and to discuss this with their officer.

“A recent young person who did Creative Voices – he thought he was being funny making inappropriate remarks but when we addressed it he said ‘I didn’t realise that’s how I came across and that wasn’t my intention.’ And afterwards he was more mindful of that and in the next group he was absolutely brilliant, he didn’t make any inappropriate remarks and the feedback was ‘this was a leader in the making’, and there was only a month between the groups.” **YOS staff**

“When I see them [a young person] again, I say, okay, what did you find in there? What did you think about that? So there’ll be ongoing discussions.” **YOS staff**

Young people spoke about how the sessions helped them better understand their own feelings by being given the opportunity to articulate their thoughts and opinions. They observed that being asked for their opinions prompted them to think more reflectively. Young people also argued that exploring the feelings and decisions of characters in specific scenarios helped demonstrate the range of consequences to different actions. It provided the space to reflect on scenarios that felt relevant to their own life and to consider the range of different ways that someone could potentially respond.

Young people said that hearing what other young people had to say would often prompt another thought or response. **It made them consider differing perspectives, reflect on how and why people might respond differently, and have more regard for other people’s feelings.** This gave young people a greater appreciation in the value of hearing different perspectives, and an understanding that one way of thinking was not the only way or necessarily the right way.

“I feel like this [London Bubble sessions] does impact me because as I said you get to know people’s views and opinions on certain things, so it makes you question your views and opinions and then question if it’s the right or wrong way or if you need to change it up a bit [...] It made me see other people’s views [...] so why is this the way they’d react and it just makes you see how other people see it. Before I was like my view’s right, you people go with my view. But I didn’t know that other people have different views and ways they approach it.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

“Another thing that had me thinking about my feelings was because like when someone else is saying something innit, they add another side to a story innit. It makes me think about it more and like “rah!”. And not just mine, it helps me think about other peoples’ feelings as well [...] Like when someone adds like a different side of a story then it makes you think ‘OK, maybe they could have felt like that innit’ [...] A different way to you.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

Improved problem solving and agency in the medium and longer term

Some young people felt more confident and equipped to make better decisions and believed that this would positively impact upon their wellbeing. They felt like they could refer back to group discussions and the stories and characters they developed, and use it for inspiration and motivation to improve themselves and make different decisions. The sessions had increased their self-belief that they could improve and make changes in their own life, just like some of the characters in the storylines they had developed. Young people also reflected on how the London Bubble sessions helped them to learn from past mistakes and ensure they did not repeat them.

“I’ve acted really bad in certain situations. Now that we’ve made that story, there’s something that we can relate to. Even though it’s not real, you can still make yourself better from stuff that [we all] put together. I imagine now that because people [in the stories] can do that it means that you can do that. It’s simple. All you need to do is write

down a story on a piece of paper to base your life on that story [...] That can change your life. If you just put the right words down, you can just look at it one day and be like 'OK, I need to change.'" **Young person • Creative Voices**

Some young people spoke about the London Bubble sessions helping them think about how they tend to act in certain situations. **The sessions made them re-evaluate whether they were doing things the right way.** One young person who had participated in the Way into Work sessions said that by prompting discussions around specific scenarios from the film they watch at the start, it made him reflect a lot on how he would respond in similar situations. He thought about what motivated him to respond in certain ways and to consider that there are other, sometimes better, ways to respond.

"We got to see like the different scenarios. When you actually think about it you get to see 'I wouldn't do it that way, I'd do it that way.' [Now] I think about what I do, if I'm going to do something, if I should do it or not. If it's not a good idea I won't do it [...] If I'm going to be in a situation I know how to choose the right way, not the wrong way like I used to [...] I'm just saying if I was to like get into a situation I would know how to choose the right path, not the wrong one." **Young person • Creative Voices**

"I get in trouble because of the people I hang around with. You see when people start to mess around I follow them. That's what I follow. But I've realised that now and I've stopped it." **Young person • Creative Voices**

"It was the movie that made me think about it. Because like [the film showed] the urge to do things that you don't really need to [...] It's urges that I've had and I've done. But I'm just saying like, I shouldn't of done it. If that makes sense? But it made me feel like there's other ways and solutions to things. There's always a solution." **Young person • Way into Work**

London Bubble and Southwark YOS staff thought that the sessions helped young people reflect and think through decisions and actions they make. **Young people have been able to explore the consequences of different actions in a safe space and therefore can feel more equipped to think about what to do in certain scenarios and to recognise how different choices could lead to different consequences.** However, they also noted how difficult it could be to evidence such impact.

"It might help, if they are then faced with a situation like that. Young people might feel more equipped to think about what to do. But they probably wouldn't come back to us and say "because of London Bubble I've decided to do this". I guess, it's like, lots of things we do, it's like planting seeds." **YOS staff**

"No programme or session is going to just stop that young person from doing what they're doing. It's got to be their decision at the end of the day. But I think the value comes from the fact that you've given them information. They can make that informed choice from what they've learnt or what they've seen. And I think for the young people, I think the fact that they've got other young people in the same group looking at the same things, reflecting on each other and what is discussed, I think that is invaluable." **YOS staff**

Particular 'Ways of Working' that led to this impact



5.3 Medium and long term impacts

Medium and long term impacts around improved relationships and improved problem solving have been discussed in connection with the shorter term impacts that feed into them, in the previous sections (relationships and self-awareness and management respectively). Additional medium and long term impacts are reported upon here.

5.3.1 Engagement with new things

Within the Theory of Change for the Creating Justice programme, we suggested that young people's immediate enjoyment of the projects was a requirement for their engagement. Having then engaged with the programme, and experienced positive outcomes in terms of increased confidence, wellbeing and resilience (as has been discussed in this report), we theorised that young people would be more likely to engage with other beneficial projects and opportunities in the future.



I had doubts when they told me about this group thing – but when I actually went I was like wow



Creative Voices was originally designed to be an 'induction' or catalyst programme for young people entering Southwark YOS at the start of their court orders. There is evidence from Southwark YOS that the programmes are still used in this way (although not by all officers).

Young people that we spoke to are more prepared to try things which they would not have done before. Some young people said taking part in these sessions helped them realise that something good could come out of doing something different. They saw the value in trying new things and taking advantage of opportunities. This is because they have had a positive experience with London Bubble, including when they were initially unsure about how they would get on in the sessions. This helped them to see what they might get out of other activities and feel increased confidence to try new things that they were interested in.

“100% [I will try new things now]. Anything that comes my way I will try it now. Because me yeah, I had doubts when they told me about this group thing – but when I actually went to the group I was like wow – so now I won't doubt things – I will try it because good things can come out of it.”

Young person • Creative Voices

“I wouldn't really say, it hasn't affected my life innit. Or necessarily my personality [...] but, it just gave me like an insight. Because basically it was a first time thing innit? It was a first time thing, I ended up making a little movie. When you do something new, you're just curious and then you might get a bit more interested. Yeah. it did give me a good insight on how it is to work with strangers and like, achieve something that was good, like a good decent movie, with the limited resources we had. Yeah, it was alright.”

Young person • Creative Voices

Some YOS staff members also reported this change in young people who had been through the programme. They conceptualised it in terms of seeing the benefits that could come from taking a risk, and in doing something young people were initially unsure about.

“Yeah it’s giving opportunities and sometimes taking that risk. So you come into a group and you don’t know nobody, you come into a group and you don’t really quite understand what it is about. But you take part in it and you enjoy it. You think yeah I took that risk and it was all right. So it’s about [realising that] taking risks is not always bad. You know, taking risks is not always negative. Taking risks is part of what we do.” YOS staff

This depended somewhat on young peoples’ starting point. For example, two young people that we spoke to reported less of an impact because they were already engaging with activities such as other drama clubs and music activities, or felt they were already quite open to trying new things. However, this was a minority of the young people we spoke to. Most had not taken part in creative activities like the Creating Justice projects before.

One young person described taking part in Creative Voices as a ‘bridge’ to other things, echoing the way that London Bubble Theatre talk about the programme:

“Because some people might think of it as work. I don’t think of it as work. I think of it as building a bridge for more opportunities [...] I feel like it did, because I feel more... I feel like I can do more stuff without saying “no, I don’t want to do that”. For example, boxing. I didn’t want to do that but I might do that [now]. I might go have a session.”

Young person • Creative Voices

There was confirmation about the importance of enjoyment for young people feeling more likely to engage with other projects. This was especially the case for those young people who didn’t expect to enjoy themselves, but then found themselves having a good time. As a result, they felt more willing to take part in other groups and activities because they could see that they had got something out of it.

Youth Ink are a youth charity based at Southwark YOS who often work with young people after they have been through London Bubble Theatre sessions. Staff from Youth Ink reported that **young people are more confident as a result of the Bubble sessions, which helps prepare them to take up opportunities provided within YouthInk.** Public speaking (as part of Youth Ink’s advocacy work) was mentioned here as something that young people would be more equipped for as a result of taking part in London Bubble Theatre sessions. This confidence boosting outcome was felt to be especially effective for people at the younger end of the project’s age range, between 13-15 years old, because they were at a ‘developmental’ age.

Several officers at Southwark YOS reported that the Creating Justice programme acts as a springboard for them to suggest other projects to young people they work with. In addition, the programme contributes to them building trust with the young people they work with. This is because young people tend to have a good time and enjoy taking part in London Bubble Theatre programmes, and as a result, the young people start to see that their case manager wants them to have positive experiences – with their order not just being about punishment.

At a practical level, being involved in London Bubble Theatre projects can highlight and bring out interests that young people have. This helps their YOS worker refer them to other projects and opportunities they might benefit from. One example was a young person who wrote music which featured in the group’s final film. The YOS staff could then refer them to a music project to allow them to continue building on that interest. This means that a function of the creative projects is to help young people’s ongoing journeys by identifying things they are interested in doing. Some young people spoke specifically about being more open and confident to taking part in other creative projects because of their experience with London Bubble Theatre.

“Creative Voices – I sometimes refer to it as an induction programme. I tend to refer my young people to it at the start of their orders. Because once they complete it, it’s easier to say ‘you’ve done that group why not try this group’ – because they show they can work in a group and it wasn’t that bad and here’s the feedback from the facilitators about how well they’ve done and you see the confidence grow per group.” **YOS staff**

One thing to note was that partly what makes London Bubble Theatre effective is how the facilitators create a unique, welcoming and respectful space in which young people can engage. This means that **whilst young people report that they would be more likely to engage with new things and other activities in the future, there is the potential that they will find themselves in groups and environments that do not provide this sort of supportive space**. As a result, it may be easy for young people to become disappointed or disillusioned. We have already discussed the importance of thinking about interventions in terms of ‘pathways’ for young people (section 5.2.1).

Particular ‘Ways of Working’ that led to this impact



5.3.2

Readiness

We defined the concept of ‘readiness’ with London Bubble Theatre staff as young people understanding that opportunities existed for them, and feeling ‘ready’ to take up those opportunities.

We found evidence through the evaluation that **London Bubble Theatre projects helped to raise young people’s aspirations and understand the options available to them**. With Way into Work in particular, the programme helped young people to think more actively about what they wanted to do as a career in the future. London Bubble staff observed that working ‘in construction’ had become a stock response that young people said when asked what they wanted to do as a career, at the start of the programme. However, during the Way into Work sessions, young people were able to consider different options and talk openly about their interests.

“We had one group where the answer to everything was ‘construction’ – like a learnt response for when an adult asks you what you want to do. By the end of the week we found out one young person wanted to be a carpenter, one wanted to be in the army, and another a camera operator in film and tv. [The group went from] ‘walls up’ responses to then talking about what resonated for them and what they could imagine themselves doing.”

Bubble facilitator

A key part of helping young people to understand that options are available to them is the fact that Way into Work is conducted in a group setting. Hearing ideas about career options from other peers helped inspire and prompt ideas in the young people we spoke with. For example, in one group, a facilitator mentioned to someone in the group about being a chef, prompting interest from another young person who had not previously considered that as an option for himself, but related it back to his enjoyable experiences of cooking traditional dishes with his family at home. As a result, one facilitator described it as ‘quite an inspirational place’ to be for young people. This was combined with practical support and role-playing interviews so that young people emerged with a plan for how they might take some steps towards achieving their goals.

Young people also spoke about feeling ready for future job interviews because they had had the opportunity to practise by taking part in and observing mock interviews in **Way into Work**. In addition, they had learnt practical strategies to prepare for interviews and therefore felt more prepared to go into these situations than they would have done before (see Education and employment section). Beyond immediate job interviews, one young person also talked about future leadership opportunities where they could now imagine putting themselves forward:

“In certain times there’s going to have to be a team leader innit [referring to army cadets], this will help me have more confidence and say I’m going to be a team leader innit and step forward.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

Particular ‘Ways of Working’ that led to this impact



5.3.3 Education and employment

Over the course of the evaluation, there were some concrete examples of young people who had taken part in London Bubble Theatre projects going on to education and employment – and attributing this to their participation (particularly in **Way into Work** given its focus on preparing people for education, training or employment). These included one young person who was successful in a college interview and another who was successful getting an apprenticeship (having previously struggled and received feedback that he didn’t demonstrate enough enthusiasm for the job).

“I think Bubble, the way they helped is kind of, explore some of the ways he can kind of sell his skills and really kind of sell himself in interviews. And I think having those practice interviews, just role playing and seeing other people do it, kind of, put a picture in his head. He saw what he needs to change. Yeah, then he was successful in getting an apprenticeship. The next interview he did, he got it.” **YOS staff**

In addition to these specific examples, general comments from YOS staff and London Bubble facilitators suggested that there were many more young people who had been involved in the groups, who had gone onto employment.

There was evidence to suggest that increased confidence in the short term translated into other settings, for example one young person reported having greater engagement in education, due to having developed their confidence by taking part in London Bubble sessions. This young person described feeling more able to speak up and ask questions and as a result receiving more positive responses and feedback from teachers.

“Even in like college like in a lesson like I’ll now put my hand up and say this and I’ll make my points innit... I’m putting my hand up more and I’m talking more and I’m giving more of what I want to say. [...] So with the teacher they basically think I can do more as well innit.” **Young person • Creative Voices**

Many of the young people who take part in London Bubble Theatre sessions are no longer in mainstream education; and for some this has been for a long period of time. One young person in this situation felt that **the projects could help prepare people for returning to the ‘rhythm’ of school.**

“Because it’s basically like you’re in a classroom already when you’re having a session. It’s just you’re not together. And, you can slowly ease your way into that rhythm.”

Young person • Way into Work

The key mechanism which allows Way into Work to achieve this impact is how young people respond to the opportunity to learn and practice key interview techniques, through mock interviews in the project. Young people reported learning a number of different techniques and strategies for job interviews which they felt more confident to put into practice in real interviews. These included:

- How to communicate and come across as interested, enthusiastic about the job and engaged;
- How to remain composed so employers felt you are ‘ready’ for the job;
- Stopping to think before starting to answer a question;
- Having positive and professional body language;
- Speaking in a more formal way;
- Doing research before an interview – and demonstrating you have done that research in order to stand out.

In general, the sessions reinforced to young people the importance of practising and preparing for interviews beforehand. **The creative approach of role playing these interviews was key to learning interview technique** as it allowed young people to think deeply about what kind of questions they might be asked that could ‘put them on the spot’ – and to think through and reflect on how they should act and respond in different situations that might arise within an interview. They also got to experience receiving feedback and putting that into practice to improve.

[How would you do things differently in an interview because of what you learnt in Way into Work?] “I’d be more enthusiastic. Because if you’re not showing interest then who’s going to want to hire you?” **Young person • Way into Work**

Because the sessions take place in small groups, young people were able to get tailored practice to help them understand their individual strengths and weaknesses. They were often surprised to see the applicability and transferability of their skills and interests to an employer, and learnt how to talk about their strengths whilst still being themselves. For example, one young person who wanted to be interviewed for a football coach position, because he’d previously played for a youth team. With positive reinforcement his confidence grew about being able to draw on that experience and the experience of looking after his younger siblings, to talk about how he’d motivate the young people he coached:

“He had so much experience that he just didn’t know he had, and I think that is the hard part about interviews is that we all have to draw on what we know is in our heads but you don’t know how to say it in the right way or you don’t know if it’s relevant and I think for him that really built up his confidence to be like, ‘Oh, OK, no I do. I do know a lot of things. I do have a lot of experience and I can apply it to an interview setting” **YOS staff**

Beyond interview preparation, **young people also spoke about having more ideas and feeling more equipped and aware of how to go about looking for jobs to apply for and who they could speak to for advice.** In some cases, London Bubble staff themselves were able to give tailored advice to young people and signpost them to support, like local mentoring services, or give them guidance about the sector they were interested in.

“If I apply for a job and it’s not working then I can speak to like a family member that has a job, like aunts and that. I can speak to them or I can go to my local youth club and say “I’m trying to find this, could you help me out?” **Young person • Way into Work**

The project is a genuinely positive thing to put on young people's CVs. A YOS staff member pointed out that it can be difficult for young people to find these examples, as they often haven't got many positive activities and experiences which they can use.

"I spent time today with an officer talking about what a young person can put in their CV – looking at things they can use in their CVs that are not related to shame [...] for a lot of young people they've not done things like [arts/theatre] at school [...] the connection with London Bubble is something young people can put quite proudly in their CV." **YOS staff**

We have previously reported the impact of London Bubble Theatre projects on young people's communication skills, including about how **it allowed young people to practice and see the value of collaborating with others. This is a key skill in the workplace**, and this was identified by one young person who felt that the group work involved in the project was helpful practice for the future, where they would have to work with and speak to people they didn't know.

5.3.4 Self-identity development

For this evaluation self-identity development was focused on the development of a non-offender identity. For example, to begin to identify more as a learner or an achiever. We acknowledged from the start that within the evaluation it would be hard to gather data about this longer term impact. This was because we were engaging with young people whilst they were still directly engaged with the Youth Offending Service. In order to ensure that the interviews with young people felt like non-judgemental and safe spaces, we also made a conscious decision not to refer or probe into the reasons for why a young person had come into contact with the YOS, and consequently did not directly ask them about identifying or not identifying as an offender. The rapid evidence assessment did find evidence of this outcome in relation to creative art projects. The mechanisms by which this occurred included using the metaphors of journeys in dramatic narratives and drama exercises that teach participants that all actions have consequences.⁴

Despite this, a few young people did talk about how their **involvement in London Bubble sessions led to them recognising their own strengths, interests and capabilities**. For example one young person spoke about how being involved in Creative Voices made them understand they had the necessary skills and creativity to make films. Another young person involved in Way into Work said the experience had made them change the way they understood themselves. They were now more aware of what they had to offer and what they were particularly good at doing. Moreover they now felt more confident about articulating those things to other people. As outlined in the 'Ways of Working' chapter, young people noted that the London Bubble sessions were a space where they did not feel judged or labelled. They appreciated that staff did not seem to judge them in any way based on their involvement with the YOS.

"Before I wouldn't be able to point out the little things that makes me, me. But with Way Into Work, I actually sat down for an hour and I realised about a lot of stuff that actually makes me unique. Not a lot of people probably do this and I feel like I must have all of these things, and I can work on this, I'm OK at that." **Young person • Way into Work**

⁴ The rapid evidence review states that 'A number of the studies found evidence that 'arts projects may help to engage offenders with the idea of change, provide offenders with a way of expressing themselves, provide a positive experience while in custody, and help offenders to imagine an alternative future for themselves' (Arts Council England 2018: 18). The mechanisms by which this occurred included: "utilising the metaphors of journeys and pathways in dramatic narratives, or the concept of roles to understand the factors which influence our identities (Walsh 2014: 12, 22); breaking activities down into short-term achievable goals which was empowering for participants; and emphasising interdependence and mutuality in drama exercises that taught participants that all actions have effects (Walsh 2014: 25)." (Arts Council England 2018 and Walsh 2014 quoted in Reid, S., and Mendez Sayer, E., 2019)

London Bubble staff saw **Creative Voices and Way into Work** as unique safe spaces where young people are given an opportunity to present a more playful and light-hearted part of their personality, whereas in most other spaces they experience pressure to present a tougher image. This aligns with comments young people made about the sessions being an escape from real life and an opportunity to relax, laugh and have fun (see section 6.2.4). London Bubble Theatre and Southwark YOS staff discussed how unfamiliar it can be for young people to enter a space where they are given the freedom to respond and act differently to elsewhere. There is an ethos cutting across London Bubble Theatre's work that young people are welcome as they are (linked to trauma-informed practice). This directly challenges the experiences that young people may have had before.

"I think it is the recognition that for those people this is an unusual experience. There is no expectation to go into a space and being validated and welcomed and mattering – so sometimes there is pushback because it is unknown and navigating an unknown is hard [...] and what that does to how they respond, they have space to respond in a different way, not how they have responded elsewhere." **Bubble staff**

London Bubble Theatre and Southwark YOS staff reflected that **the sessions might have a greater impact in the area of 'self-identity development' on younger cohorts** (e.g. 13-15 year olds) because of the developmental stage they are at and the likelihood they might be less entrenched in a particular lifestyle. At this younger age young people are still in the process of developing their personality and making choices about how to present themselves to the rest of the world. Consequently, the London Bubble sessions might be more of an opportunity for this cohort to influence how they view and present their own persona. It was not possible for this evaluation to test this hypothesis – but this could warrant further exploration for future research.

"[Creating Justice is possibly] particularly impactful on the 13-15 year old cohort. Maybe developmentally for 13-15 year olds that lends itself to that opportunity to expand their personality. Obviously development happens differently for all but at 13-15 you are making a choice about which part of your persona you expand and present to the world, so maybe something significant about a space where you can present your fun playful parts of your persona, even if a small space, when in other spaces you have to present the hard man – and every time you present it, it gets bigger – so any opportunities to present other parts of their persona – that is significant." **Youth Ink staff member**

Particular 'Ways of Working' that led to this impact



5.4 Training and wider sector impact

During the period of the evaluation, London Bubble Theatre ran two rounds of training sessions on ‘trauma-informed practice’ and ‘communication’ for practitioners working with young people. The first round of each was delivered face to face, whilst the second round took place online due to Covid-19 restrictions. Although feedback was unanimously positive from those who attended these sessions, some professionals commented that they would have expected more people to attend. The uncertainty surrounding Covid-19 and lockdown restrictions also affected how regularly London Bubble Theatre ran the sessions, compared to what was originally planned. As such, the reach of this element of the programme was less extensive than originally hoped, affecting its overall impact.

5.4.1 Confidence, tools and knowledge

Practitioners who took part in the training sessions came from a range of different settings including YOS, schools, police and the arts sector. **Those we spoke to felt that this mix was a great strength of the training. It allowed them to hear different perspectives and strategies from a wide range of practitioners.** In addition, the training participants represented a small sample of a wider system that young people are interacting with in different ways. Some practitioners we spoke to therefore found it useful to: reflect on how young people might be interacting with a number of different professionals across the system; share knowledge and expertise; and think about how to work together more effectively to improve experiences and outcomes for young people. For example, one practitioner commented on a useful discussion in the training between Peer Navigators (16-25s with lived experience of being in the youth justice system) and those working in schools about the experience of being thrown out of class, which they felt was illuminating for both sides. For one professional who tended to work independently, it was a good opportunity to spend time with others to explore the challenges and practices in their work.

“It made me feel confident, I think because I’m generally on my own even though I know there’s other people out there it’s nice to get together and hear other people’s experiences, even exchange a few numbers, all working towards the same goal.” **Practitioner**

Some professionals who attended the training had a high degree of understanding and knowledge of the subject area already, but were keen to spend time reflecting on their own practice, learning new techniques and hearing about different ideas from others. In the communication training, a YOS staff member said that it was less about learning the theory (which they were already familiar with) and more about learning how to put that theory into practice. As a result, **most staff we spoke to did not feel that they had considerably improved their knowledge, but did feel that they had improved their confidence in using different approaches with young people that they worked with.** For those that did feel they had increased their knowledge, this was often in terms of better understanding the scale of speech and communication needs, or experiences of trauma, amongst the young people they were likely to be working with.

Practitioners developed a greater understanding of the range of different techniques that could be used in communicating with a young person, including using visual tools. They spoke about now having a ‘toolbox’ to draw from, and knowing that what worked for one young person might not work for another. **In the trauma-informed practice training, practitioners reflected on practical ways they could adapt their practice to take individual young people’s needs into consideration,** whilst still delivering the session for the whole group. **Practitioners spoke about how the training helped them reflect on their own practice.** This included thinking through how they had responded to challenging situations in the past and what might have worked better, as well as reflect on their strengths, weakness and opportunities to improve. For those who attended the trauma-informed



For me the most successful part of it is in having taken the time to specifically think about trauma-informed practice



practice, some commented that it helped them to reflect on trauma more widely, including in their own life and that of colleagues and young people they worked with, and think about how they might be able to better support the young people they work with.

“One thing I learnt from the trauma-informed practice was to look at the causes of why they might be behaving like that and think, what are the reasons they might be disrupting the lessons, or whatever. And trying to find ways to support them and bring them back into the space [...] learning the right way to respond when a young person is behaving in a challenging way.” Practitioner

“It made me more aware of my own traumas in life, helped me progress more and realise where sometimes in all honesty I’m letting my trauma influence me.” Practitioner

We spoke to those at the start of their career and those with a lot of experience – but all felt that reflecting on their practice was an important and useful outcome from the training. For one person at the start of their career, the training helped them understand more about some of the connections around speech and communication needs and other areas in a young person’s life, which they felt was important to apply to their work with young people. For those who had more experience or a higher degree of knowledge of the subject, they reflected on how they tended to use the same tools and techniques. **The training helped them to learn some new tools and continue to develop their practice. For others, the training helped to reinforce and validate what they were already doing,** and gave them the language and confidence to more deliberately do things which they might have been doing more instinctively already.

“For me the most successful part of it is in having taken the time to specifically think about trauma-informed practice. So going, “Yes, I’ve done it. But let’s take a few hours to specifically sit and think about it...” consolidating ideas or connecting ideas that I already had. That’s probably the most important thing for me.” Practitioner

Many practitioners that we spoke to reported that they had referred back to some of what they had learnt in the training (for example, the ACE’s pyramid) and were reflecting on how to improve their own practice. Some practitioners had already incorporated certain elements of what they learnt in the training into their own work with young people.

“I really took the visual parts of it... I’ve definitely used that since the training in my direct work with young people... I was doing a session with a young person around like negative peer pressure and peer influence, normally I would talk about it but I thought, you know, I’ll use a video instead to sort of, summarise what peer influence was [and] then use the example to identify what they thought it was and who was sort of experiencing it in the video. And then just using like visual cards and stuff [...] So definitely that was something I definitely put into practice.” Practitioner

Some practitioners reported sharing learning from the training they had attended with other colleagues. This had been done in a number of ways including: giving a presentation of what they’d learnt in a staff meeting; emailing key reflections to colleagues; and printing out training resources to share. Some professionals expressed the limitations of these ways of sharing learning though, feeling that the creative methods used in the delivery of the training meant it was important for their colleagues to experience the training in person. For example, one YOS staff who had attended the communication training commented on

feeling disappointed that more colleagues had not taken up the opportunity, which was attributed to them not seeing the value of the training in addition to regular training they already received around speech and language. More work therefore needs to be done to demonstrate the added value in attending London Bubble Theatre training.

“I was quite happy and I felt like I really actually learnt something and actually enjoyed that, it’s not often that I come away from training feeling like that. So yeah, I couldn’t shut up about it if I’m honest.” Practitioner

5.4.2 Relationship between London Bubble Theatre and Southwark YOS

Throughout the evaluation, staff from London Bubble Theatre and Southwark YOS were incredibly positive about the relationship between the two organisations, which was seen as highly complementary. As well as taking part in drama-led professional training run by London Bubble Theatre, YOS staff also commented that they learnt from London Bubble Theatre through taking part in or observing the sessions with young people.

“The relationship, I guess is quite unique with YOS [and London Bubble]. Before coming to YOS I wouldn’t have ever thought ‘Oh, there was a theatre company that might work with a YOS and do these sort of programmes’ [...] I just think it works really well to have that sort of separate space for young people to go and learn these skills, that doesn’t feel like it’s part of their order and more like a voluntary sort of, ‘Oh, this would just be useful.’” YOS staff

London Bubble Theatre also aspires to create wider sector impact across both the youth criminal justice sector and participatory arts sector, in terms of equipping professionals to work holistically and creatively with children and young people. During the timespan of the evaluation, London Bubble Theatre also took part in events to share learning about their approaches further afield, including for example presenting at a workshop and taking part in a panel discussion run by Frontline called ‘Creative Approaches to Engaging Vulnerable Young People’. Frontline provides training and support for new and existing social workers, and aims to bring a new and innovative approach to delivery of social work to children and families. They run lunchtime workshops and invite both social workers and non-social workers. London Bubble and Southwark YOS staff came together to discuss how the arts can be used to engage and inspire when working with young people. They also spoke about the barriers to using creative approaches and explored how to overcome them. 75 professionals attended the workshop. 16 attendees filled in a Frontline evaluation form. 88% said they felt motivated to take action following the workshop and 75% said they now have a better understanding of creative approaches. It should be noted that disseminating findings and learning from this evaluation report also form part of London Bubble Theatre’s approach to sharing learning across the sector.



6.0 Implications of Covid

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Not being seen was quite freeing. I expect they were not as worried about people's judgements

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6.0 Implications of Covid

6.1 Changes made to programme delivery

The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated making sweeping changes to the delivery of the Creating Justice programme. Initially, projects were paused and postponed; and later delivery was moved online using Zoom video conferencing to bring groups together from home. This meant a few key things were different:

- The final output of Creative Voices was a film rather than a play. The London Bubble facilitators played out the characters and storyline developed by the young people.
- The first round of Way into Work during the pandemic was shifted to become a film and exercises/resources produced by London Bubble Theatre for Southwark YOS to use with young people in socially distanced visits. The film was an adaptation of what was originally performed live during sessions. Once sessions resumed – the film continued to be used as a way to start discussions.
- The final visit to a work setting as part of Way into Work was not able to go ahead.
- Games and exercises that could work online were naturally less physical and more verbal.

Overall, London Bubble Theatre staff and Southwark YOS were positive about the way in which the sessions worked online. Some Southwark YOS staff admitted that they had been sceptical about how well the sessions would work online, given their physical and interactive nature.

“I think they gave enough space. Often you need more time in a virtual environment to do the same sort of tasks.” **YOS staff**

6.2 Covid context enablers

Taking part in the online sessions appeared to give young people greater anonymity which helped them to feel comfortable and to contribute more to the sessions. For the Creative Voices final output, facilitators noted that they didn't have to work around stage fright, and that it was easier to get young people to contribute – for example recording one line into their microphone during a zoom call for use in the final film. The editing process also meant that young people were given equal representation in the film as much as possible, and billed equally in the credits, so that all could see their contribution in the final output.

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In the comfort
of their own
home they're
more
comfortable
to say things



“In the comfort of their own home they're more comfortable to say things, more vocal more quickly... Not being seen was quite freeing. I expect they were not as worried about people's judgements and what people were saying.” **Bubble staff**

“I actually thought I'd been given feedback about the wrong young person. [Probably] something about it being online. I think he had his video off. He was super confident and had loads of ideas about what the actors were going to do and where the story was going to go. Because he's normally not that confident. He's normally really quiet in a group. So yeah I was surprised that I thought it must be something about it being just voices. Because most of them I think were resistant to putting their cameras on.” **YOS staff**

“The atmosphere is different, I don't know how to explain it. I just felt more by myself. But not lonely, I just felt secluded. Like I could just speak whenever I wanted to speak.”
Young person • Creative Voices

The facilitators were able to adapt sessions to a virtual format successfully, and were still able to model good communication. Southwark YOS staff felt that the London Bubble facilitators were adept at finding interactive and engaging games for use in the virtual sessions and maintaining the energy that was needed to keep young people engaged. There was also a sense that modelling turn-taking became even more important in the virtual setting because it could be easy to talk over each other, especially where young people had their cameras turned off. This meant the facilitators could really demonstrate how respectful and calm communication could help the group to work more effectively together.

“I think it kind of amplifies more that sort of respecting other people’s views and willingness to talk in a virtual setting.” YOS staff

Taking part online also seemed to increase rates of attendance. The final round of Way into Work covered by this evaluation period (which was run entirely online) had full attendance from young people. This is highly unusual and suggested that young people might find it easier to take part when that meant logging on to Zoom rather than attending the YOS in person. If they forgot about a session, a YOS staff could get in touch to remind them and they could still easily take part. Some Southwark YOS staff felt that young people also had very few other activities they were able to take part in during this time, and so may have felt that taking part in London Bubble Theatre was a welcome relief from boredom. There was some evidence that referrals to the projects also increased because case managers wanted things to offer their young people. Although this certainly doesn’t represent a positive context for young people themselves, it does show that the delivery of the projects were able to be successful despite the restrictions. Some members of staff commented on ways in which a hybrid model of delivery could work to increase attendance and engagement going forward.

“We had concerns about online engagement, but from what I have seen young people input as much if not more than in the room [...] for the programme there have been some positives from engagement from online and film making and I hope we won’t lose all of that when we go back to face to face.” YOS staff

Additionally, the audience for the final Creative Voices output was larger than usual during lockdown. They felt that it was easier for Southwark YOS workers to join online than it would have been in person, and the same was true for the family members of young people participating. Staff reported emotional responses from family members, suggesting that the virtual environment did not sacrifice the engagement with, and emotional power of, the final output (an important culmination of the project in terms of building confidence and experiencing pride, as discussed in section 5.1.2).

Switching to a film meant the final output was longer-lasting. As opposed to a one-off performance, the fact that the final output took the form of a film meant that in theory it could be re-watched and reflected on, or something the young person could show to others to say they were involved in. Some London Bubble staff felt that just knowing that there was a permanent output from the session could be uplifting for young people, and give them a sense of pride. Similarly the Duane film was a tool YOS staff could use to continue conversations with young people following their involvement with Way into Work.

“They don’t even need to watch it again. Just the fact that it’s there – evidence of myself participating in something successfully – that’s forever. What you get is a digital footprint that’s not trying to replicate a moment in your life but representation of your participation.” Bubble facilitator

Online delivery could also help with some aspects of safeguarding. One member of staff at Southwark YOS commented that there can be issues with some young people attending the Southwark YOS office because of its location i.e. they would not be safe to walk through the Peckham/East Dulwich area due to ongoing rivalries and conflicts. They could therefore see a scenario where online delivery could be offered as an alternative in cases where young people are unable to attend the sessions in person.

6.3 Covid context challenges

There was less physicality and fewer creative exercises within the sessions. Without being able to get up and move around, or use creative exercises, facilitators reported that it was harder to maintain pace and create an energetic atmosphere. Some facilitators felt that it was harder to be flexible and adapt sessions online, especially if there were other issues to contend with (such as poor internet connectivity).

“Pre-Covid it was easier to be more physically expressive, physically in the room with young people, any opportunity to jump up and do something, say something. Easier to encourage them to act, say something or do something...In person you can set the atmosphere, set the tempo, you can slow it down.” **Bubble facilitator**

It was easier for young people to get distracted at home. London Bubble Theatre staff felt that young people’s home spaces were not generally conducive environments for creativity, because there was little separation with other aspects of their life. Facilitators also had to manage the situation of wanting young people to engage fully (by turning their cameras on) whilst not wanting young people to feel as though it was an invasion of their privacy, or that others would judge their home environment.



Pre-Covid it was easier to be more physically expressive



Young people having their cameras off made it difficult for facilitators to gauge their engagement. As opposed to in-person delivery – where facilitators can read the body language of young people to see whether they are listening – delivery online (where most young people did not turn their cameras on) meant that it was often difficult for facilitators to gauge whether someone was just listening quietly, or not engaging with the session at all. Facilitators were able to invite those who were quieter to contribute, but reported instances of having to repeat instructions and questions, which made them feel unsure whether the young person was fully engaged in the session.

Relationships cannot be maintained following the project. Because young people had their cameras off during sessions, facilitators and participants do not know what anyone looks like. Although groups were able to bond and work together successfully within the sessions, this means that facilitators would not be able to recognise the young people if they were to see them in the area. This potentially loses an aspect of continuity and connection within the community for young people.

Some elements of casual social interaction were lost due to Covid-19 restrictions. Within the Creating Justice programme, there are opportunities for socialising built into the projects such as going for dinner at the end of Way into Work. In addition, casual social interaction is a useful way for London Bubble Theatre staff to gauge young people’s mood and interests; for example seeing how they interact with YOS staff when they attend, or chatting before and after the sessions. With Covid-19 restrictions meaning that delivery took place online, these aspects of the projects were lost. This made it more difficult for facilitators to get to know the young people, tailor the sessions to their needs and get a sense of the impact the project was having on individuals.

“We don’t get the casual interaction, when you’re in the YOS building you see them talking to their YOS staff, get a peripheral picture. Someone saying ‘did he speak?’ or ‘I’ve never seen him smile before’- so those [kind of] comments.” **Bubble facilitator**

Aspects of the projects which involved young people going outside their comfort zone were also more limited. We have discussed how it appears that young people felt safer and more comfortable to take part in the sessions from home during virtual delivery. Although taking part in the project was itself a step outside their comfort zone for many young people, there are specific elements built into delivery which challenge young people (such as visiting a workplace for an interview in Way into Work). These were not possible due to Covid-19 restrictions, which could mean that young people may not experience the growth which comes from challenging themselves, working through their anxieties and successfully managing a situation which is outside their comfort zone.

Talking about body language and appearance within interview skills in Way into Work was more abstract. When delivery takes place in person, young people in Way into Work are able to discuss how members of the group ‘present’ in their interview practice, as well as practising and receiving feedback on this themselves. In virtual delivery, this was explored using a film where actors demonstrate different types of body language and ways of speaking in an interview context. Young people had less opportunity to put this into practice themselves and receive feedback, because they were not visible to others on camera.

Interaction with audiences was a bit more muted in the final presentations. Some London Bubble Theatre staff felt that audiences were ‘a bit polite’ on Zoom, so there was less interaction (although this could have been due to larger audience sizes which arose from virtual delivery). Staff were keen to get back to in person delivery because ‘applause feels better in person’.

“They can get it online but just to get that praise in person – it feels better in person [...] Applause feels different, even when you can unmute it’s just not the same as being in the room.” **Bubble staff**

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*What else can
London Bubble offer,
because they've
really enjoyed it.*

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7.0
**Barriers, enablers
and opportunities
for delivery of the
programme**

7.0 Barriers, enablers and opportunities for delivery of the programme

7.1 Barriers

7.1.1 Engagement and perceptions

London Bubble recruit young people for Creative Voices and Way into Work directly through Southwark YOS. **Young people can therefore easily associate taking part in these London Bubble sessions as an obligatory part of their court order.** Young people, YOS staff and London Bubble staff all identified this as a key barrier to getting young people to engage positively in the sessions. Given that a key aim of the sessions is to empower young people and create a space where everyone is equal – facilitators have to work very hard from the start to counteract the perception that this is part of their ‘punishment’. Sessions are normally run from the YOS building – which can make it even more difficult to create a positive atmosphere that is not associated with their court order. YOS and London Bubble staff both commented on having to decide whether a young person should take part if they really do not want to be there. When asked about their attitudes and expectations ahead of the first session, some young people mentioned not looking forward to it and feeling as if this was something they just had to do as part of the court order. However young people said this changed over time and that they started to feel more positive about their involvement.

“I didn’t really want to be doing Bubble to be honest, but I have to do it. [that] kind of changed over time. As I done it, it was alright.” **Young person - Creative Voices**

“[We are working] in the YOS setting where the space is negative and associated with punishment and court orders and reporting. The challenge we have, but that we do well, is creating that positive space.” **Bubble facilitator**

Young people can misunderstand what the sessions involve and feel anxious that they will be coerced into acting or taking part in a play. The fact that the sessions are run by an organisation called London Bubble Theatre reinforces this assumption. Young people can enter the space feeling anxious and uncomfortable and with a defensive attitude – ready to refuse to engage. More work needs to be done around how sessions are initially introduced to young people, and to support YOS staff to know how to make it clear to young people what the sessions will and will not entail.

With Way into Work, the last session (which involved a mock interview in a real office setting) could be overwhelming and nerve racking for many young people. Some young people would therefore not attend. London Bubble have therefore amended the sessions and started to bring professionals into the YOS building for the mock interviews in an attempt to make young people feel more comfortable. London Bubble are always prepared to amend the sessions in order to find an approach that still pushes young people outside of their natural comfort zones – but does so in a way that is not overwhelming or stops them from attending.

“In the beginning it’s really difficult to explain to young people what London Bubble is like because the first thing they have in their head is, oh, my God, it’s a theatre company and I don’t act!” **YOS staff**

Staff from London Bubble, Southwark YOS and YouthInk all recognise that **in trying to provide support for young people, timing is everything.** A young person has to be in a place where they are able to accept support. Sometimes there is too much going on in a young person’s life for them to be able to effectively engage in an intervention like Creative Voices or Way into Work.

7.1.2

Attendance

Young people tend to have a lot going on in their life, and so London Bubble sessions are always competing for attention with other things that young people could be doing instead. In addition to this, **many of the young people taking part through the YOS have particularly chaotic lives. This can have an impact on attendance** – whether that means missing sessions all together or turning up late. This is further exacerbated by the fact that young people do not always possess their own phone (sometimes because it has been confiscated by the police). This makes it difficult for YOS staff to contact them in a timely fashion to remind them about sessions or find out why they haven't turned up.

Southwark YOS and London Bubble staff both mentioned that **recruiting enough young people for Way into Work and finding the right structure to facilitate their attendance has been a challenge**. This has included doing the sessions once a week for between three and seven weeks, doing sessions over three days in a row, or staggering sessions over mornings and afternoons. Both London Bubble and YOS staff acknowledged that perhaps there is no perfect formula and that all they can do is continue to be flexible and adapt the sessions depending on the particular needs or preferences of each cohort.

7.2

Enablers

A lot of the factors that enable the delivery of Creative Voices and Way into Work are outlined in the 'Ways of Working' chapter and so will not be repeated here.

London Bubble Theatre works hard to demonstrate to the YOS that they are equipped to safely and effectively engage with young people. **Ensuring that staff are trained in trauma-informed practice, in speech, language and communication needs, and in health and safety acts as a key enabler in getting senior leadership buy-in from the YOS.**

"We need buy in from senior leadership in the YOS – and that's about how we at London Bubble articulate ourselves to the YOS and to social services – so we make sure we have trauma informed training, communication training, mental health first aid training, so that we are equipped. Because sometimes resistance comes from up high in services who are protective of the young people they work with, quite rightly, so we have to show we are equipped and can meet their needs." **Bubble staff**

The close working relationship between London Bubble and the Southwark YOS is a key enabler to the delivery of all the projects being run under the Creating Justice programme. The relationships that London Bubble have built with the YOS over the years has built trust between the two organisations, which is essential because the YOS are entrusting London Bubble with the care of vulnerable young people who take part in the sessions.

The YOS play an indispensable role in the recruitment of young people. They ask caseworkers to refer young people and ensure that the young people recruited are all able to safely take part (e.g. taking note of gang affiliations). YOS caseworkers also help remind young people about each session and therefore help with attendance rates. This close relationship also leads to more YOS staff taking part in the practitioner training that London Bubble offers. YOS workers are also able to provide information to London Bubble facilitators about the young people. This allows London Bubble to then tailor the sessions based on particular interests or needs of the young people.

Where possible, a YOS worker will sit in on London Bubble sessions. **Having YOS staff present helps London Bubble to demonstrate the value and impact of the sessions**, which in turn helps convince YOS staff to continue to refer young people to the projects. This also means that a YOS member of staff can feedback to individual YOS staff about anything

that emerges from the sessions about the young people. It can provide caseworkers with more information about the young person – including things about their interests, preferences and skills, which can help them think about other interventions or projects that young people might be interested in taking part in. London Bubble staff spoke about how important it was to be able to pass information on to practitioners who will have a longer term relationship with each young person. When YOS staff were not able to attend – this was seen as a missed opportunity.

“A networked approach [is helpful] to be able to pass on information we gather about a young person during the project – to pass that onto someone the young person knows that can do something with that information [...] [YOS staff] have the ongoing relationship with young people [...] For example in Way into Work I’m thinking about one young person talking about wanting to be a joiner because his grandad used to make furniture, and he suddenly admitted this thing that he admired and respected. It was brilliant that he had that moment but if we go away with that information, who’s going to do something about that? There needs to be a network of people to support those young people. So a lot of it relies on the YOS staff.” **Bubble facilitator**

London Bubble are very flexible with how they run the sessions. YOS staff said this was a key enabler – and appreciated the fact that London Bubble are willing to amend the structure or the dates for sessions in order to work around the needs of the YOS. London Bubble staff also note that having facilitators with experience in the creative arts and in particular with theatre – is a key enabler for being able to easily adapt sessions and be very flexible in how they deliver.

“It’s quite easy to [tailor the sessions], we are a theatre company so it’s like improv. You can do it off the cuff sometimes.” **Bubble facilitator**

7.3 Opportunities

7.3.1 Suggestions for how to improve Creative Voices and Way into Work

Some London Bubble staff and young people thought that the Creating Justice projects could run over a longer period of time. Some facilitators argued that extending both Creative Voices and Way into Work could allow them to build stronger relationships with the young people. Furthermore, extending the number of sessions would then allow the projects to become a more consistent presence in young people’s lives. One young person said Creative Voices would work well as a longer term intervention. A few young people thought that 5 weeks did not give them enough time to input into the final output (film or play). The process could feel rushed and young people wanted more opportunities to further develop, refine and input into the film or play.

“Secretly I feel like it should be longer, but that’s my view. I feel like we need more time to connect, and to make like a better performance. When it’s 6 weeks long, it’s like 3 weeks is getting to know each other, everyone’s vibes, the next 3 weeks it’s not enough time to put things into place and act. It kind of feels rushed. It works but maybe 7 or 8 weeks [would work better].” **Young person • Creative Voices**

With Way into Work specifically, adding a few extra sessions would allow young people to do several mock interviews each, rather than just doing one. This would allow them to practice incorporating any tips, advice or suggestions they had been given. There would also be more time for reflection – to think about next steps and what skills they need to further develop. Furthermore, it would be easier to include a session at the end where professionals could attend to give their own feedback on people’s practice interviews.

“I guess my thinking is that, when you get to the point where they’ve done one mock interview, you want to go ‘OK, well that was the hard bit, what’s next?’. You know, really focus on what do they want to do or what do they want to get out of it? What skills were they lacking? I think you could almost then go one on one with each young person or as a group and go so much further with it. It sort of feels like the beginning in some ways.”

YOS staff

Some London Bubble facilitators struggled to fit in everything within a 1.5 hour session. Some more time could be built into the start of each session to allow for late comers and for facilitators to have some time to chat to each young person one-to-one as they arrive.

Whilst some Southwark YOS staff were strong advocates for London Bubble Theatre projects, some staff commented that referrals tended to come from the same officers every time. London Bubble staff felt that YOS staff tended to refer more once they had experienced the project themselves (by sitting in on sessions or final performances) and had seen the impact. **It was suggested that it could be helpful if every YOS case worker attended a Creative Voices and Way into Work session.** This could increase the numbers of YOS staff referring young people to the projects, and help them get a better sense of what the sessions involved and make it easier to explain it to the young people they then refer.

London Bubble staff spoke about the **opportunities available for a hybrid model now that they knew they could run sessions online.** For example, holding an online session before the first face to face session to introduce the project and begin to get to know one another. A common theme to emerge was that young people often do not know what to expect. Having an introduction session online would give young people a better sense of what it would involve and give the group an opportunity to start building a rapport. London Bubble and YOS staff also spoke about there being more opportunity to extend the projects by running additional sessions online.

However, staff also agreed that they would not want young people to have the option to join a session remotely that has been planned as a face to face session. It would be very difficult to have to run a session that would work effectively for those in the room as well as those connecting remotely. Therefore, each session would have to be run with everyone physically in the room or connecting remotely – rather than having a mixture of ways in which people ‘attended’.

The short film that was made to help run Way into Work remotely (Duane) was seen as a useful tool going forward to help introduce the Way into Work sessions and facilitate discussions with young people about seeking employment. They saw the potential in creating new films to use in this way in the future. However, London Bubble staff were concerned about creating materials that could then be used or accessed outside of the sessions. For example, the YOS wanted to use the Duane video with young people outside of the Way into Work sessions. They acknowledged that this could then take away from the impact it can have when young people see it for the first time in the first Way into Work session.

London Bubble staff acknowledged how much **young people seemed to enjoy contributing towards developing a film. London Bubble might consider incorporating this element** of the remotely run Creative Voice sessions into the face to face sessions going forward. However, if it continues as a film project then more consideration must be made to how the sessions are structured. Creative Voices was not originally designed as a film making project and therefore there is scope to tailor sessions so they are better suited to the making of a film.

Having more regular workshops for London Bubble facilitators to get together and share learning would be beneficial. It could be an opportunity to discuss different techniques, tips, games and activities that can help run sessions. It could also be a space where

facilitators could highlight challenging scenarios they faced and then collectively discuss different ideas for how to respond in similar situations.

Young people who take part in Creative Voices or Way into Work are not commonly taking up other opportunities offered by London Bubble Theatre. London Bubble run many other projects that young people could get a lot out of. London Bubble and YOS staff acknowledge **more work must be done to increase take up of other London Bubble Theatre opportunities.**

“There maybe needs to be some kind of follow up work because with a lot of our young people, it’s like what now? What else can London Bubble offer, because they’ve really enjoyed it.” **YOS staff**

Holding a **structured evaluation workshop that facilitators and YOS case workers would attend a few weeks after the final Creative Voices or Way into Work session could be helpful.** Facilitators and YOS staff could discuss what worked well and less well. It would also be an opportunity to share important information about each young person and reflect on the perceived impact that taking part had. It would also be a useful platform to consider possible next steps for each young person. For example, to discuss other opportunities within London Bubble Theatre that might be of interest for a young person.

Furthermore, **London Bubble Theatre may want to work with Southwark YOS more closely to gather information more systematically in the future about impacts.** For example, during the course of this evaluation YOS staff and London Bubble facilitators suggested that there were many examples of young people who had been involved in the sessions who had gone onto employment. However, this type of information was not being collected and recorded.

YOS staff highlighted the powerful impact that the Creative Voice final performance can have for families and YOS staff who attend. It was suggested that **a wider range of stakeholders could be invited to attend final performances.** For example local councillors, MPs, or Directors of Children’s Services. It would give them valuable insights into the lives of young people and the challenges they face today.

7.3.2

Suggestions for how to improve professional training sessions

- Send the training PowerPoint slides and additional resources and materials to attendees following the training;
- Sessions that were more interactive, with space for reflection and discussion, were preferred over sessions that involved the one-way communication of a large amount of information;
- Practitioners found it more difficult to digest information when a session focused on theoretical information and used densely packed PowerPoint slides;
- Practitioners wanted more time to interact and network with other practitioners that were present. This was a particular issue when training had to be delivered online;
- Practitioners found the practical discussions most helpful. Some practitioners would have preferred even more space to share tips and ideas about how to respond in particular real life scenarios;

“It would have been nice to have had a sort of action plan as a facilitator. What are the different things that I can do myself? That would help the young people? So we did discuss that a little bit but I feel like that would have been really useful to have had more discussions about what it is I can do when there’s a young person who doesn’t understand or is having difficulty communicating with me? Maybe going into more detail about the kind of top ten things that everyone can do, that would have really helped me I feel. It would have been less theoretical then and more practical.” **Practitioner**

- Training sessions could be longer. It could sometimes feel rushed with not enough time for interactive discussions. Some practitioners suggesting splitting each training session over two days;
- In order to attract more practitioners from schools – London Bubble Theatre could offer to run the training on school INSET training days;
- The training content felt more applicable for staff working in secondary schools. If inviting primary school staff to join the training sessions – London Bubble could amend or add content that was more applicable for primary school aged children;
- YOS staff suggested that London Bubble attend a YOS service meeting a month or two before the training days to explain what the training will involve. The flyers did not contain enough information, so this could help boost recruitment.



8.0 Conclusions

Conclusions

This evaluation took place at a very particular time, with fieldwork starting just as the Covid-19 pandemic swept across the world. This meant substantial changes had to be made to the delivery of the Creating Justice programme (and therefore also to the evaluation). However, despite this, we have found a range of positive impacts for the young people who took part in the Creative Voices and Way into Work projects during this period, as well as the professionals who supported them and/or took part in training sessions delivered by London Bubble Theatre.

In particular, there is strong evidence that the projects play an important role in improving young people's confidence and communication skills and giving them a sense of enjoyment and achievement. The programmes are delivered in such a way that allows young people to explore their individual interests and aspirations.

In the medium term, there is evidence that Way into Work helps young people to feel more prepared for job interviews and inspires them to think more widely about their aspirations. For Creative Voices, there is evidence that taking part in the programme helps young people to feel ready to take part in other activities and groups, whether that is within the Youth Offending Service, or beyond. London Bubble Theatre's role in catalysing engagement for future pathways through interventions and activities is recognised and appreciated by Southwark YOS. There is also evidence suggesting that taking part in London Bubble Theatre projects increased young people's self-belief that they could improve and make changes in their own life, just like the characters in the storylines they developed. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that young people may be better equipped to solve problems and make better decisions when faced with challenging situations in the future.

Where evidence is less clear is about the impact that the programme can have on young people's relationships outside of the programme, because the programmes are short-term and the positive and respectful atmosphere created by the facilitators can be very different from the scenarios that young people encounter elsewhere. Nevertheless, some young people felt that the programme gave them a greater appreciation for others' perspectives, and this was something they could apply in other relationships and situations in future.

There is an ongoing question about the 'stickiness' of what young people learn and discover about themselves in the programme. London Bubble Theatre staff are aware that they are providing a short-term positive influence in the lives of young people, but that young people are facing considerable obstacles and negative influences in their lives at the same time. Despite this context, we found some examples to suggest that young people remembered what they had learnt at the end of their court orders (partly due to the creative and visual ways of working) and young people themselves felt that they would be able to put some aspects of what they had learnt into practice, or that a change or realisation they had had during the project would be permanent.

The training sessions delivered for professionals have also led to impact. Most clearly, this has been in terms of consolidating existing knowledge through the use of creative methods which improve recall and allow attendees to apply the knowledge using practical tools and techniques. In addition, working in a mixed professional group has been key to achieving impact and this aspect of the training could be strengthened through wider proactive recruitment.

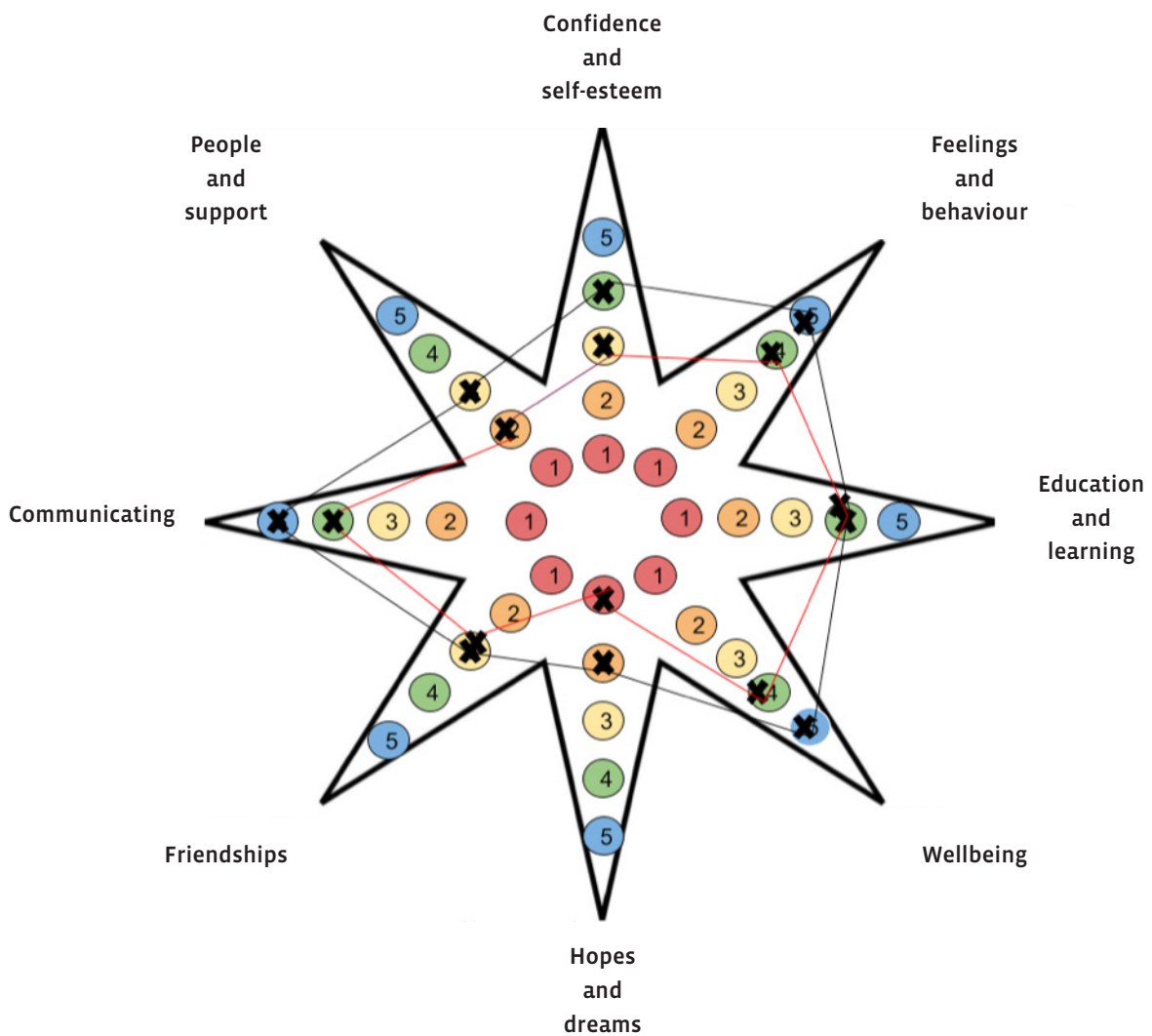
Throughout the report we have highlighted the importance of the ways of working that underpin how London Bubble Theatre deliver these programmes, and therefore achieve social impact. Throughout the evaluation it was clear to us that these ways of working are important mechanisms that explain how the impact is achieved – including the use of creative and youth-centred approaches.

The previous section has highlighted some areas for London Bubble Theatre to consider in order to improve the programme. Many of these improvements are about finding ways to offer more to young people, in recognition of the impact that the Creating Justice programmes can have, but also of the longer-term nature of support needed. Other improvements are about further improving and consolidating the relationship with Southwark YOS. The evaluation findings have underscored the importance of this relationship in maximising the impact of the programme and providing the best delivery and opportunities for young people in the criminal justice system.

There are some things which fell out of the scope of this evaluation, which represent opportunities for further evaluation and learning about the programme, including:

- understanding how and if the impact created by the programme changes as face to face delivery returns;
- evaluating the Playing Safe aspect of the Creating Justice programme, for which delivery was unable to go ahead during the period of this evaluation because of Covid-19 restrictions;
- implementing follow-up in conjunction with Southwark Youth Offending Service to understand longer-term outcomes for young people who participate in London Bubble Theatre programmes. However, as we've discussed, London Bubble Theatre projects are just one of many interventions that may be offered to a young person through their court order – making longer-term impact more difficult to attribute; and
- using the star diagram designed for ongoing evaluation, to collect systematic and quantitative light-touch data about impact for young people taking part in the programme.






Appendix A: Star Diagram



The Star helps to look at eight parts of life that are important to all children and young people:

1. **Confidence and self-esteem:** feeling at ease, knowing you matter
2. **Feelings and behaviour:** how you deal with difficult feelings
3. **Education and Learning:** doing well at school and enjoying learning
4. **Wellbeing:** being myself, making choices, feeling good about myself
5. **Hopes and Dreams:** hopeful, determined, making things happen
6. **Friendships:** making and maintaining friendships
7. **Communicating:** getting my ideas across in lots of situations
8. **People and Support:** getting support from those around me to be my best

For each area there is a group of statements. The young person looks at the statements and makes an assessment about where they are currently at for that area, on a 5 step scale:

-  **Step 1 is red:** for when things are bad and they're not changing, or you are not very interested in that area
-  **Step 2 is orange:** when things are bad but it looks like they could change or you are considering changing things
-  **Step 3 is yellow:** when you and other people are working on it, or you are starting to have a go at something
-  **Step 4 is green:** which is when things are mostly OK or you are working on things
-  **Step 5 is blue:** which is where we want to get things to – things are working well for you and you are enjoying things

The star is designed to be used one-to-one in conversation with a professional working with a young person, or as a group activity. At a minimum, the star should be completed at the beginning and end of the project. Additionally, it can be used as a follow-up activity, or (depending on the length of the intervention) at a mid-stage.

Statements are given for one example area below – if you would like to see the full statements for all areas or use them in your own work please contact admin@londonbubble.org.uk to make a request.

Confidence and self-esteem

-  **5. Resilient**
 - I mostly feel at ease. I don't worry about things too much
 - I feel happy enough to be me and can make positive choices
 - I know that I matter
 - I know what I am good at and what I enjoy doing
-  **4. Finding what works**
 - I mostly feel at ease but sometimes get anxious
 - I am finding things that build my confidence but sometimes I need help to put them into practice
 - I mostly trust myself and believe things will be OK
-  **3. Trying**
 - I am trying ways to feel better but they often don't work
 - I often feel anxious and worry about things
 - I try to say what I need and make positive choices but it's hard
-  **2. Accepting help**
 - Like the red step, but I have some support with this
-  **1. Stuck**
 - I mostly feel bad about myself or get very anxious
 - I don't believe things will be OK
 - I can't say what I need or want so I go along with others
 - I don't have any support with this, or I don't want it

Appendix B: Star Diagram results

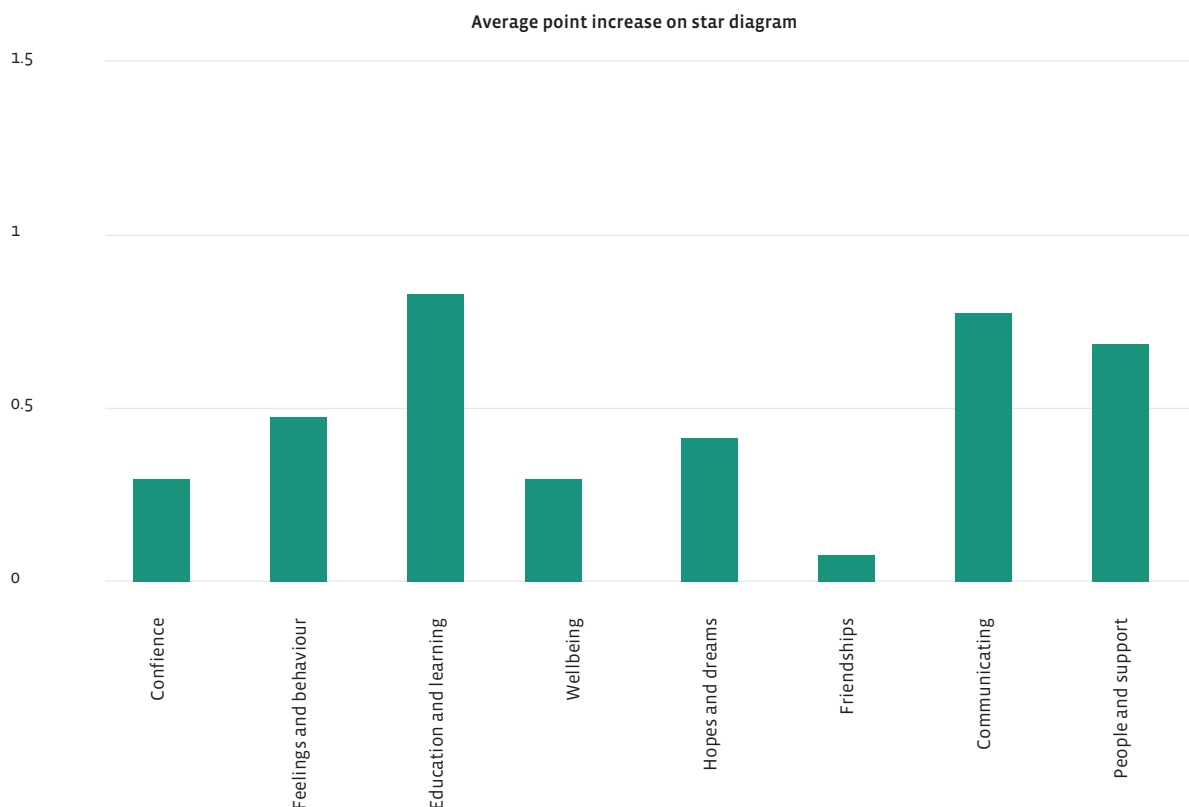
Average point increase on star diagram

Some small changes were observed in the star diagram between the start and end point for the project. These are shown as averages due to missing names and/or data. Data collection was severely impacted by the move to online delivery.

As a result the findings should be interpreted with caution, as they are based on small amounts of data and different amounts of data at each point (~22 at baseline and 13 at endline).

However, there is some indication of areas upon which the Creating Justice programme had the most impact, according to young people's self-reported scores. These include: 'Education & learning'; 'Communicating' and 'People & support' which all rose on average by more than half a step on the scale. This chimes with findings from the qualitative interviews, in which young people described the positive experiences they had during the programme, including experiences of trying new things and achieving good results; of positive experiences of communicating and being listened to; and of being part of a group in which people were supportive and respectful of one another.

The 'Friendships' category saw the lowest increase, in line with findings from the qualitative interviews (see section 6.2.5).





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