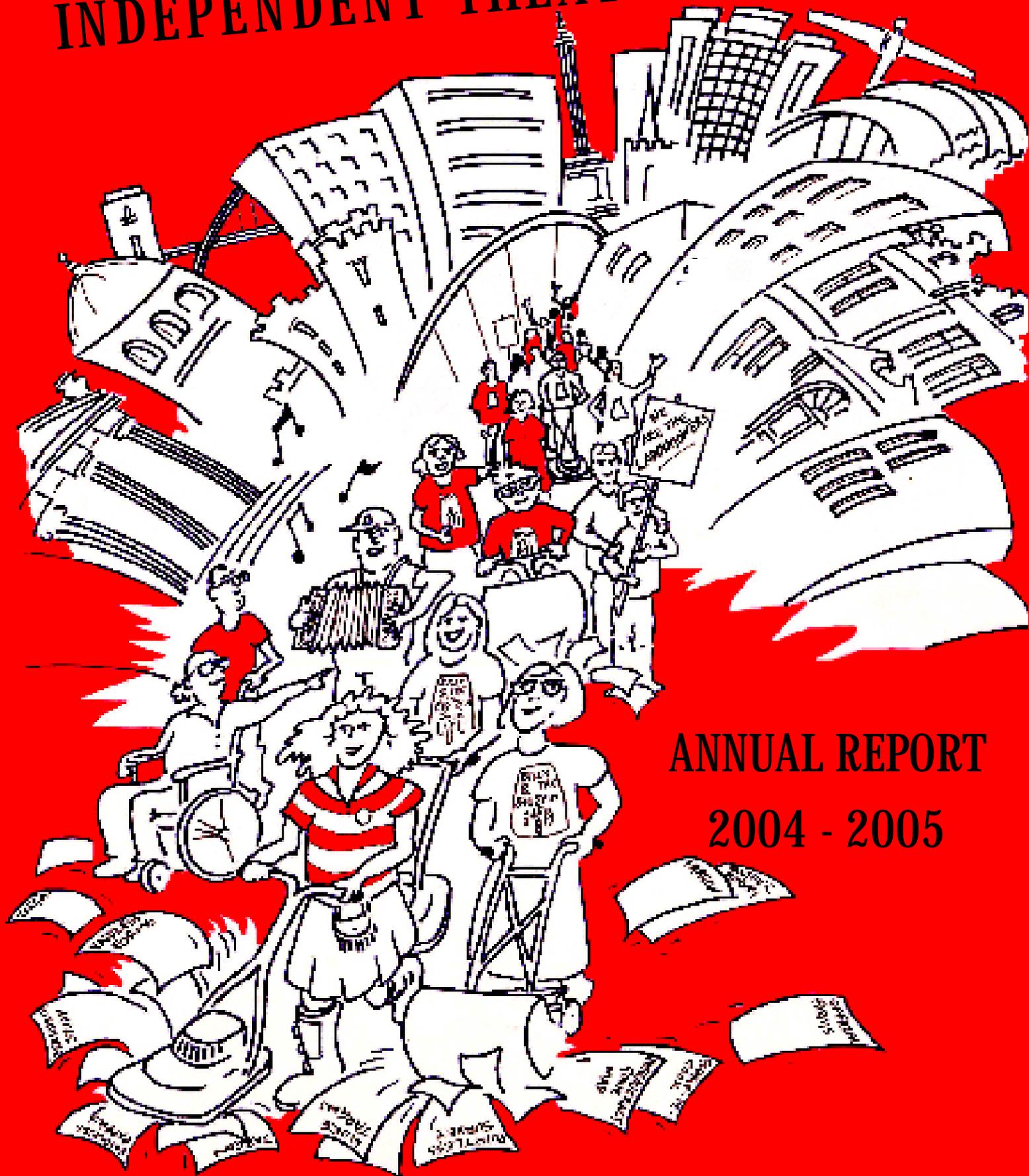


THE LAWNMOWERS

INDEPENDENT THEATRE COMPANY



ANNUAL REPORT
2004 - 2005

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THE LAWNMOWERS ANNUAL REPORT

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Foreword

Quick as a flash another extraordinary Lawnmowers year has gone by - sustained by the energy, dedication and humour of the company members and staff!

The opening of our wonderful new space in November 2004 was packed with friends and colleagues and it seems as if many of them have never left! The Company's home has become a welcoming hub of activity, information, and support for people with learning difficulties interested in the arts and training.



All three core projects are firmly established and continue to develop fresh energy and enthusiasms, with some founder members of the Lawnmowers taking a well-deserved rest and several new members joining. Crocodile Krew have extended their range and reach to supporting other groups in setting up and running their own events, and Liberdade is firmly established as a unique, path-finding apprenticeship programme.

Lawnmowers Independent Theatre Company is increasingly consulted by policy makers and funders seeking to develop programmes aimed at improving opportunities for people with learning difficulties in employment, in the arts and in training. In 2005/6 the Company aims to



raise funds to establish a ground-breaking arts employment development initiative that can ensure the excellent practice and wisdom of the Company reaches out to more and more people.

Lawnmowers Independent Theatre Company connects people and the making of public policy, and the models the Company has demonstrated are receiving the national recognition they deserve. Over the next three to five years the whole Company and the Board will be striving to extend the Company's influence, particularly in the area of employment.

It is, as ever, an honour to be associated with the work of Lawnmowers!

Katherine Zeserson - Chair, Lawnmowers Independent Theatre Company Board of Trustees

Director of Learning and Participation at The Sage Gateshead

"Since David joined the Lawnmowers he has been calmer, more settled, confident and happy. He feels mentally challenged as there is always something new and exciting to do. He loves playing his music within a group. and he loves starring in shows and performing for others. David enjoys the Crocodile Klubs, where he can socialise with people. David has found new, valued friends at Lawnmowers. Thank you for giving David a new lease of life!"

Karen, David Champion's sister.

Who we are!

Since 1986 The Lawnmowers has been a vibrant company run by and for people with learning disabilities. The Lawnmowers employ people with learning disabilities and the three groups within the company co-ordinate and manage their own projects. The Lawnmowers lays the foundations for learning disabled people to participate fully in their own society, shape their lives and achieve their aspirations. As a company we aim to create a sustainable future for our many current and forthcoming projects so that we can continue to offer a rich blend of cultural training and social events to people with learning disabilities.



THE LAWNMOWERS LIBERDADE APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME

offers a three-year apprenticeship for eight young adults with learning disabilities, developing knowledge about performance, business, training skills; and exercise, diet, and fitness. The Apprentices' objective on graduation is to set up and run their own physical theatre company.

THE LAWNMOWERS ACTORS create theatre and drama for social change, generate issue-based performances and workshops and develop their skill for legislative theatre. The actors tour their work regionally and nationally and enjoy international recognition.



THE LAWNMOWERS KROCODILE KREW are six learning disabled adults who train in performance, DJ skills, technical, administration and organisational expertise to host nightclubs and social events for the learning disabled community. The Krocodile Klubs and Big Snapper shows provide a vital arena for celebration of the learning disabled culture. The Krocodile Krew are currently recruiting three new members.

By placing themselves alongside the daily struggles faced by people with learning disability, The Lawnmowers work towards a just and equal society while honouring and shaping learning disabled people's culture. The Lawnmowers value and support places and situations in which learning disabled people can explore and develop their ideas and take control of their lives. We are constantly researching and considering new ways of working.

Our Year

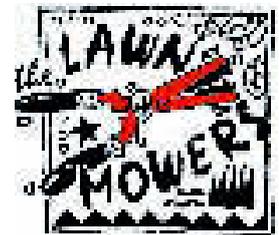
Here are some of the highlights of our busy year:

- * The refurbishment of our new accessible dance studio was completed
 - * Our new premises were opened by Mick Henry - leader of Gateshead MBC
 - * Liberdade Apprentices delivered a mentoring and training event
 - * Two new educational DVDs were completed for distribution
 - * A week-long winter training school was held
 - * Three new productions were devised, produced and toured
 - * We created a second Big Snapper mega club in March 2005 with over 750 guests
 - * An Accessible Skills poster was designed for The Keyfund
 - * The Blue Teapots invited us to Southern Ireland to give mentor and peer training
 - * We co-wrote a Music Technology Course for Gateshead College
 - * Disability awareness training was delivered to Gateshead MBC employees
 - * We helped to develop a new Skills Action Plan for the region
 - * We worked at the outdoor festival in Hexham
 - * There were six Krocodile Klub nightclubs
 - * We recruited new company members
- ... and **MUCH** more!



"I really enjoyed the Opening Evening, and Andrew Dixon (Chairman Northern Arts Council) thought it was great - compliments to everyone for the quality of all they did. I've been following your progress with admiration! Keep on doing what you do so well." **Councillor Mick Henry, Leader of Gateshead Council**

This is us!





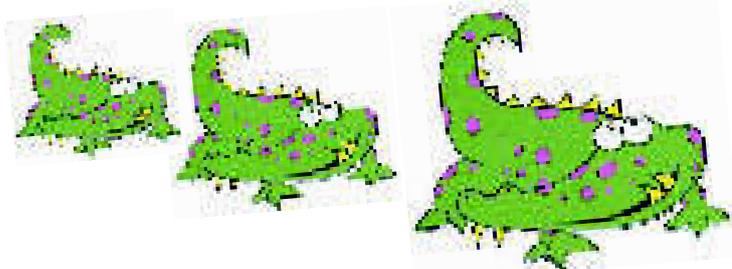
We also benefit from the skills of some of the region's finest sessional workers... ...and our brilliant band!



The Krocodile Krew



The **KREW** are learning disabled volunteers who give their time freely to offer a vibrant social life to their community. They meet regularly to organise technical and DJ training and to set up and run the Krocodile Klubs, reaching people all over the North East. Research overwhelmingly shows that the learning disabled are still one of our most socially-excluded groups and the Krocodile Klub is the only regular night club run by and for people with learning disabilities in Gateshead and the region. For some it is the only time they have a good night out to meet friends, form relationships and extend social networks.



IF WE CAN DO IT - SO CAN YOU!

The Krew have run workshops to teach other people with learning disabilities the tricks of the trade, to find the recipe for a good night out, and how to mix music that stirs the crowd.

Despite social-inclusion and much needed Government initiative, sadly there are few examples of nightclubs and social networks that honour and celebrate the learning disabled culture. We wish to be part of initiatives and changes that allow people to access their culture.

FROM SUNDERLAND TO STAFFORD

Providing stage set-up, sound and support, the Krew have toured with the Lawnmowers for 14 shows on the Elvis Experience Tour 2004.



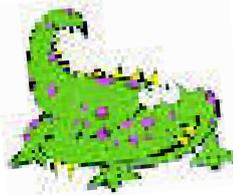
IF YOU DON'T ASK... TIME TO NEGOTIATE

The Krew met with Sage Gateshead to investigate holding some Krocodile Klubs in the fantastic new building on Gateshead Quayside. 'Invade the Sage' is coming soon!



KNOWLEDGE FROM THE COLLEGE

The Krew have completed their NEOCN in music technology and DJ skills at Gateshead College. With their tutor Catriona McAvoy, they have written a course aimed for people with learning disabilities. Visits to radio stations, performing live at the Federation Brewery and writing music for the Krocodile Rap were just some of the assignments completed by the Krew.

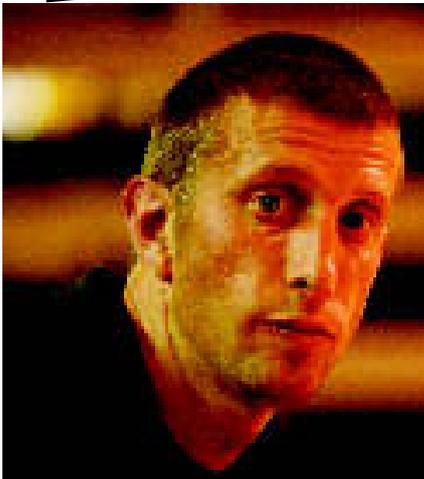


THE KROCODILE RAP

With the support of Sam Allen, a Sage Gateshead Apprentice, the Krew wrote a rap song about the Krocodile Klubs which they performed live on stage at the Big Snapper 2.

REACHING OUT

As part of his outreach post, Andy Stafford - 'McHighlander' - supports the Krew in spreading the word about the Klubs. Andy brings his vast experience, enthusiasm, knowledge and a strong pair of hands to the project.

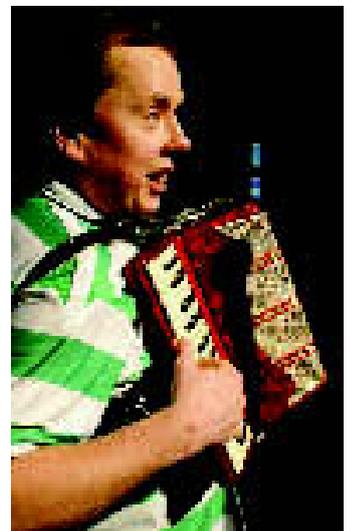
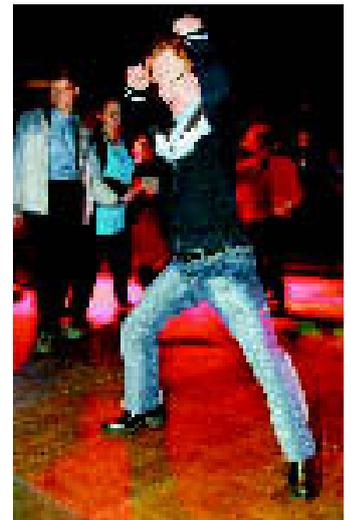
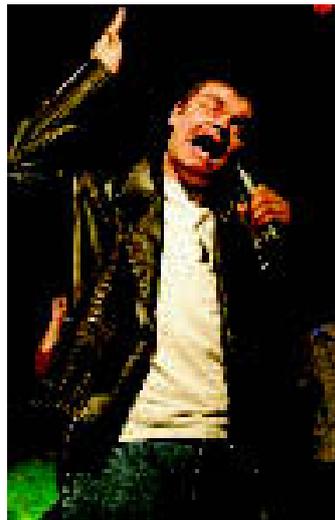


"The Krew have always worked hard towards whatever goal has been set. They are constantly developing new skills with enthusiasm" **Catriona McAvoy. Gateshead College**

The Big Snapper 2

FUNDRAISING CAN BE FUN!

Since forming, the Krew have worked with the Keyfund. After successfully completing the four stages of the Keyfund process they were able to apply for their *Big Idea* - hosting Big Snapper 2.



The Big Snapper 2 fell on St Patrick's Day so the Krew added an Irish twist to the evening!

"Brilliant! I'd like to sing and dance on the stage!"

"All of it was great!"

"Best night I ever had! The music... the stage... the dancing!"

"Seeing my friends was best!"

"We want to be up there doing it!"



"An amazing night! I've never seen so many smiles. A huge success!"

Everyone at the Arena enjoyed working with such a magical team." Jaclyn Curtis, Event Co-ordinator.



LOTS OF PEOPLE - LOTS OF WORK

The Krew spent months preparing for the big night - talking with The Arena, designing new flyers, publicising the event, deciding what to play, organising performers and decorating The Arena.



KEYFUND

The project was so successful that the Keyfund have asked the Krew if they can use The Big Snapper 2 as a flagship 'Big Idea' project.



"The Keyfund was extremely impressed with the Krocodile Krew. They worked as a team, were creative and enthusiastic and showed commitment and responsibility while retaining a fabulous sense of humour!" **Rozi Purdy,** Keyfund Coordinator.

Lawnmowers actors

"The Lawnmowers has done a hell of a lot for me. I've been all over the country - had a chance to visit places I wouldn't normally be able to get to. It gives people with learning difficulty an incentive to try something because they think 'if he can do it so can I.' They see the whole company working together and the good support they get. It changes attitudes about how people with learning difficulties can work." **Andrew Stafford, Founder member.**

*"What do I get from Lawnmowers..?
Friendship, a sense of humour, stimulation, playing music - playing the keyboard with my band; Going to Glasgow - a Celtic fan like me!"*
**David Champion,
Musician**



"I like going away on the residencies and I like acting with Lawnmowers. I like the Klubs and I've made good friends. Last year we toured all over with 'Walk the Walk' and I acted in 'Elvis' and 'Billy'. In Billy I'm his mum, the dad, one of the Sisters from Hell and a teacher. It's great to make the audience laugh."
**June Keenleyside,
Founder member.**

"In the Billy show I play Parkinson and a worker in the shipyards. Billy asks how long I've been there and I say: a long time, I had hopes and dreams like you and look at me, still here... Time to leave, he says"
**Frank Gallagher,
Lawnmowers actor.**



"I've made a lot of new friends. Everybody's friendly and helps each other. We work well together as a team."
**Gillian Lay,
Lawnmowers actor.**

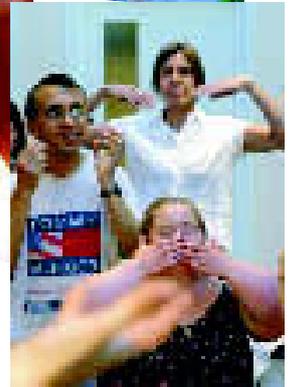


"Joining Lawnmowers has given me a lot of confidence and my independence back. I play three parts in 'Billy'. I like teasing the audience and I like putting the cake in Andy's face. It makes the audience laugh."
**Lisa Kelly,
Lawnmowers actor.**

"You can create so much with drama if you use your imagination. You can be in the Artic without moving from the building. You can play someone from the past and make up your own characters. Our workshops involve everybody, taking parts and showing how they can do stuff they always wanted to do."
Paul King, Founder member.

Workshops

Our highly skilled actors show that a learning disabled company can create exciting theatrical experiences. As important as our performances are the drama workshops that we design specifically around the groups with whom we work. They provide opportunities for people to use drama to explore issues.



'The Elvis Experience' tours with an attached workshop for groups to develop their own person-centred plans to be used in real life. 'Walk the Walk' workshops explore how we can use legislation to change the future, especially regarding our place and aspirations in the world of work.

We were privileged to mentor and host many fantastic groups and individuals this year. We visited Galway and hosted the Blue Teapots in return. We also hosted Prism Arts here in Gateshead. Many students, both in groups and as individuals, study our methods. The strength of workshop skills acquired by the company over the years place them in high demand nationally since everyone recognises the real changes this work helps to bring about - whether about how to make choices, how to run the health service or your own company.



On the Road

'The Elvis Experience' and 'Walk the Walk' continue to be in huge demand and our programme this year included touring both these shows as well as researching and rehearsing our new one - 'Billy & the Big Yin'.



'The Elvis Experience' was prepared for a larger tour. Two musicians with learning difficulties - Danny and David - rehearsed with Ben and Michael to form an accomplished band. We hope to secure funds for them to develop future musical opportunities for people with learning difficulties.



The entire company are involved with 'Elvis'. The Crocodile Krew provides technical and stage management support, and The Liberdade Apprentices lead the dance to the live music of our increasingly talented band. Touring outside the region is hugely exciting but logistically complex. Because of the interactive nature of 'The Elvis Experience' the audiences are smaller to enable them to dance as well as recording songs in 'Sun Studios'. Last year we played 'The Elvis Experience' to well over 500 people.

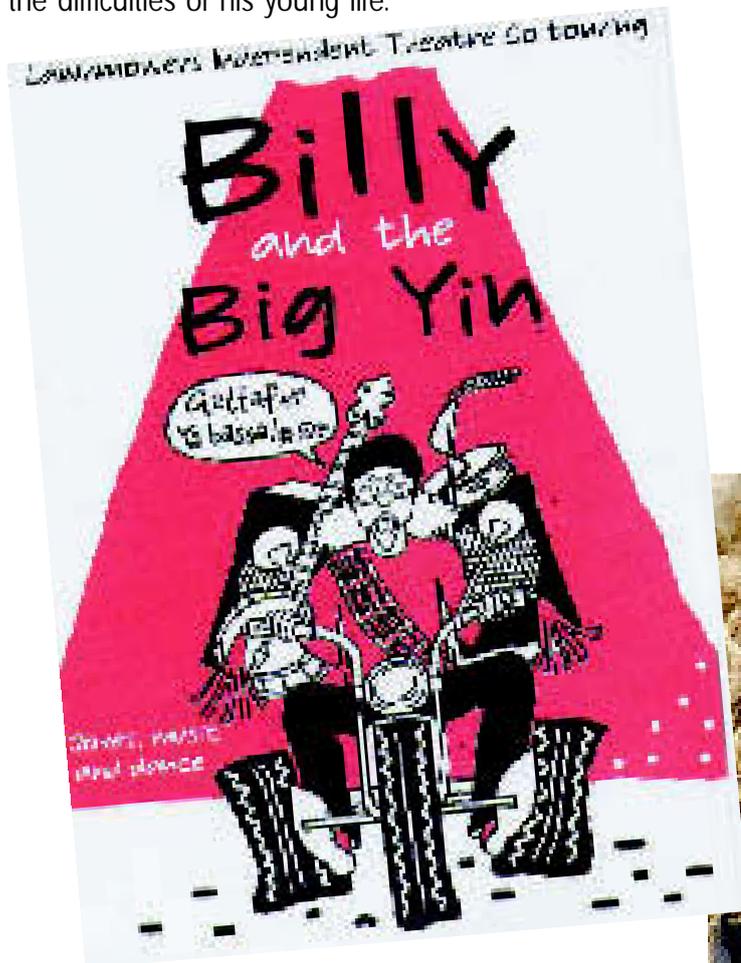


'Walk the Walk' goes out with a smaller cast allowing us to respond easily to national events. Last year the show reached over 6000 people, many of them with learning difficulties, seeing their own history for the first time. The actors completed a new educational video called 'Walk the Walk' which is available nationally and proving very popular.



Billy & The Big Yin

It's been a busy year, devising and rehearsing the new Lawnmowers show Billy and the Big Yin. The show is based around the life of Billy Connolly from a small boy. It explores the way he uses humour to look at some of the difficulties of his young life.



The whole company takes part in and tours with The Big Yin - the Actors, Crocodile Krew and Liberdade Apprentices.



As we take a guided tour of Billy's life this seriously funny show encourages us to take a walk through our own. We find out how Billy woke up, sobered up and spoke up for himself - and ended with the last laugh.

"...just brilliant! I'm very proud of you all!" Andy's mum

"Fantastic... talented actors... positively unique!" Ashdown Care

"...absolutely hilarious. I'm taking my friends to see it at The Sage to see how great they are and what learning disabled people can do!"

Irene, Wrekenton Base

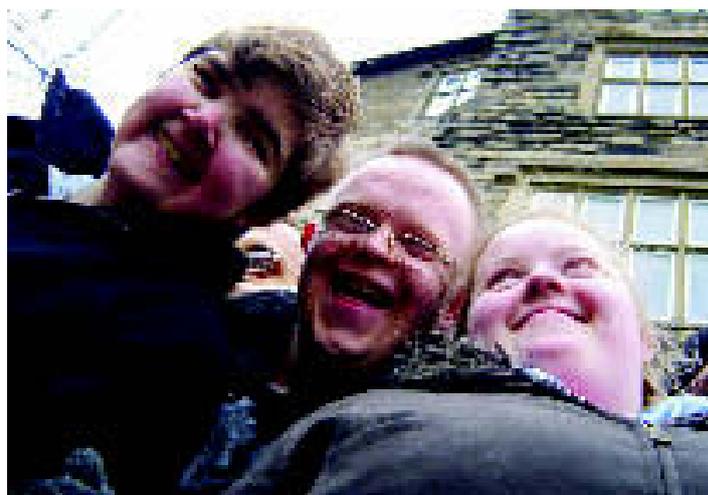


"...interactive... appealed to all our abilities. Fantastically good!" June Allen, North Tyneside College

The Liberdade Project

THE PROJECT

"The Liberdade Project" is now in its third year. It is a model apprenticeship for a pilot group of eight people with learning disabilities based in The Lawnmowers new dance studio. We are training to become a physical theatre company producing and performing our own shows; planning and running training schools and working for the education and advancement of employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities nationally. We will develop our model apprenticeship to help other groups to go on and build their own social enterprises.



OUR NEW STUDIO

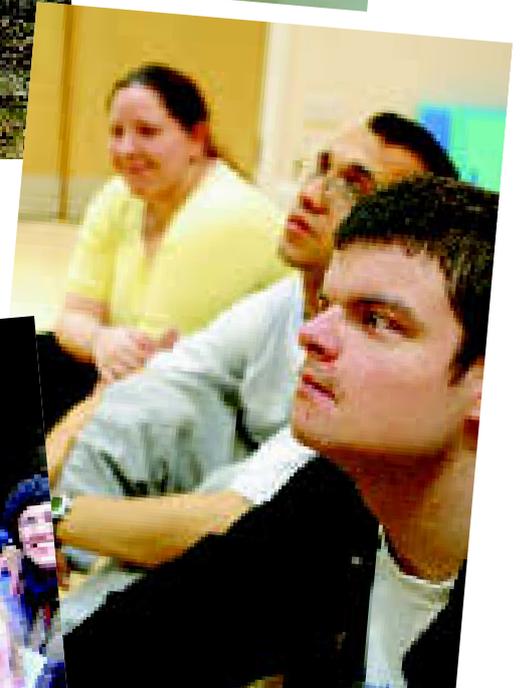
In 2004 we took possession of our fine new dance studio. We are thrilled with it, and so are the many other groups that come to work in our exciting new space in Gateshead. We have used it to train, to devise and rehearse our first two shows and for many workshops delivered to visiting groups including our Winter School in February. We say a big thank you to the TWP Included Communities Fund who generously funded this space.





THE WINTER SCHOOL

In February 2005 we ran a very successful Winter School with three visiting groups. The Lawnmowers and the Apprentices ran many different sessions focused on building enterprise skills.



"Everybody is GREAT to work with!"

The Liberdade Apprentices

"JUST THE JOB"

Our first show is called "Just the job". We based it around The Apprentices' own experiences and it looks at the problems encountered by people with learning disabilities while accessing employment provision. Our developing style of physical theatre tells the story through movement, text and music. Audiences everywhere have enjoyed the performances; including regional and national employment conferences and learning disabled groups.



"...the best two weeks ever! I couldn't ask for a better company to work with. I've really enjoyed the work experience and hope that I can come work with you all more soon! The very biggest thanks!" **Malcolm, Work Experience placement.**

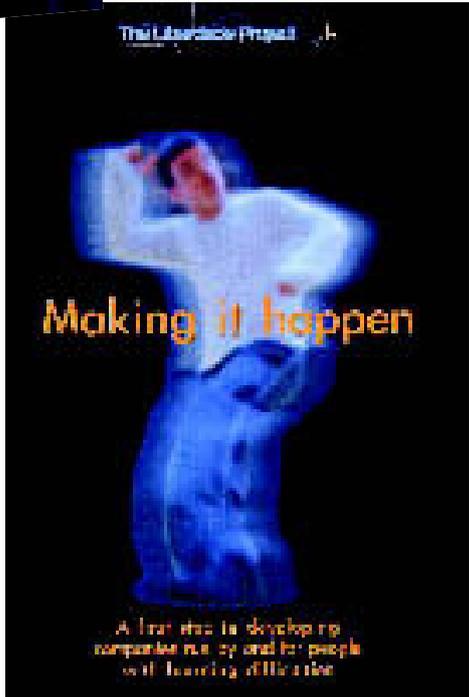


OUR WORK

This year our work has broadened, bringing us increasing opportunities to take it out to a wide range of audiences. We performed at three regional employment conferences and one national conference, delivered training courses to several regional groups and completed our DVD "Making it happen", which has been very popular. With all these successes we are getting more and more bookings - which help us work towards a sustainable future.

THE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The Liberdade Development Project is an offshoot of the Liberdade Project. It is an employment initiative, developing a training, mentoring and support system for groups of people with learning disabilities to gain the skills and opportunities to run their own apprenticeships, leading to setting up social enterprises.



Our new DVD

'Making it happen' is our first Liberdade DVD. It is the story of how we started our company and how other people can start theirs.

"I love being part of the Company because we get to show people what we do!"

Behind the scenes

The admin staff

Our admin office is the hub of the organisation, tying all the projects together by developing uniform systems and ensuring people stick to them!

When all of our groups are on the premises, there are over thirty five people bursting through the doors requiring various levels of assistance - immediately!

Anything goes - from ordering a dozen taxis, organising pick up and drop off points with volunteers, staff and carers, to installing a database and making sure our events are advertised to our hundreds of networks; organising events, developing audiences, tutoring our clerical trainee volunteers and coping with the steady stream of business and queries. Systems are continually being developed to cope with workloads as business increases.



Clerical Trainees

The company has always offered clerical training opportunities to people with learning disabilities. We expanded the programme recently and recruited two volunteers as clerical trainees.

The volunteers decided they would like to compile, produce and distribute a regular newsletter to advertise the company's events, and to report on their highs and lows. Setting up the newsletter and running it gives the volunteers an opportunity to learn financial, clerical, reporting, writing and information technology skills.

The volunteers have negotiated assistance from Northumbria Daybreak who will work with the Evening Chronicle to produce the newsletter.

"Andrew has gained confidence since he joined Lawnmowers! He's visited other parts of the world and travelled all over the UK to conferences, performances and workshops. He's made many good friends and gets so much out of entertaining and putting across information to people like him. He talks about the group: how Gillian has fitted in so well, how Lisa always seems to be able to lift the spirits of the group if rehearsals are not going well... Since I became ill, Andrew's felt supported by the rest of the group and his colleagues." Margaret Stafford, Andrew's mum.

Money matters

The company has a very high-quality financial system in place. For example, during the company's Jan - Dec 2004 accounting year, we received awards from 22 different funding streams including a high-maintenance award from Europe.

Each funder has a different grant year depending on the time of an award: some paying quarterly in arrears, some paying a 100% grant over two or three of the company's financial years, some paying quarterly in advance, some paying annually and all these funders require financial and progress reports at varying intervals.

Managing funding, monitoring earned income, ensuring deadlines are met for the Government's financial year in relation to Inland Revenue Returns and ensuring we meet the requirements of Companies House and the Charity Commission is a complex task - but the company achieves it all this with maximum efficiency!.

All systems and records are easily accessed.



Trustees, staff and volunteers receive regular financial reports and accounts are available for scrutiny upon request.

Funders and lightning

We greatly respect the electric energy of our Trustees!

Between them, our Trustees have a wealth of professional business expertise and also have vast experience of working with people with learning difficulties. The following people serve on our Board:

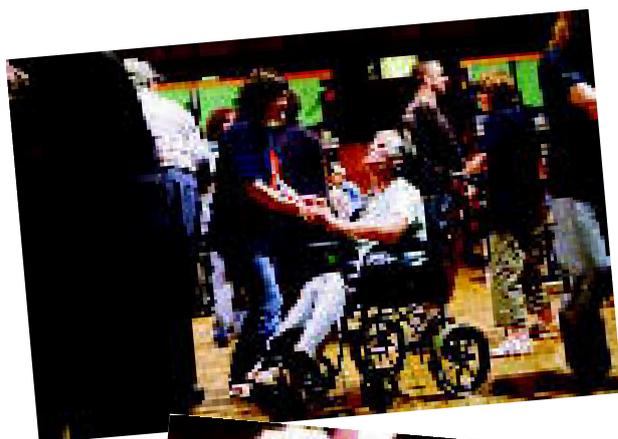
David Price - Works for the University of Northumbria as well as being a well respected Social Researcher

Ian Armstrong - Works for Gateshead MBC and represents the Council on our Board

Katherine Zeserson - (Chairperson and acting Treasurer) Works for The Sage Gateshead as Director of Learning and Participation

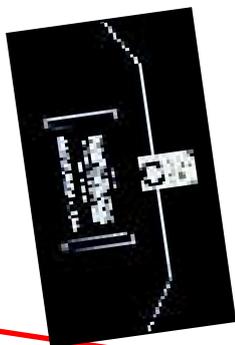
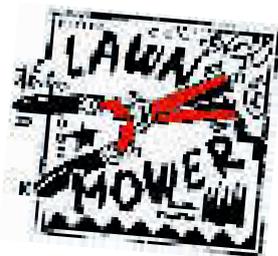
Beth Ford - Works advocating Disability Rights in South Shields and also works in Disability Journalism

Tim Keilty - (Company Secretary) Works with people with learning difficulties at Skills for People, Newcastle.
Most of the Trustees undertake their roles in a personal capacity



And thunderous applause to our generous funders!

The Big Lottery Fund
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation
Greggs Trust
Northern Rock Foundation
Century Radio
The Keyfund
W A Handley Charitable Trust
The Lankelly Foundation
William Leech Charity
Arts Council England
The Nationwide Foundation
Gateshead Neighbourhood Renewal Fund
EQUAL Community Initiative (European Social Fund & TWEDP)
Lloyds TSB Foundation
The Hadrian Trust
The Joicey Trust
Henry Smith Charity
The TyneWear Partnership Included Communities Fund
Community Foundation - The Robert Muckle Fund
Community Foundation - Akzo Nobel International Paint Fund
European Social Fund Cultural Sector Development Initiative



Lawnmowers videos, too!



The future is ours!

Busy as The Lawnmowers always are, we have big ideas for the future! Here are some of our aspirations:

... beginning a study on legal services provision for people with learning disabilities and their access to the justice system. Funding opportunities will allow us to carry this work through to practical recommendations and real changes.

...investigating the use of music within the learning disabled community.

... hosting even more of our celebratory occasions. Touring; developing new venues - like The Sage Gateshead - more night clubs, workshops, visits, residencies, open days, film nights and music nights.

...creating a health and fitness group and researching a Big Film Project.

...and continuing to blaze our trail into a confident, financially sound and positive future!



...and now a last word from Ozzy...



We love this speech from the Apprentices, which was delivered by Ozzy at our official opening in November 2004:

"We have been working for the last year in our new space, learning new skills. We have achieved some of our aims and goals but we have many more. The future is ours. We shall look forward to teaching others in our studio about dance improvisation and running your own company. We would like to run summer schools and control and raise our own money.

As we work together we get closer like a family. We are united. Like all families we have to keep our home clean and tidy and someone always has to do the washing up. In our space we can work without being disturbed. We hope one day that we can run our own company. We hope to get more space so more people can enjoy our home. It would be great to run open classes, a cinema and maybe even a cafe and bar - but that is the future and we welcome it.!"





THE LAWNMOWERS

INDEPENDENT THEATRE COMPANY

Swinburne House
Swinburne Street
Gateshead

Tyne & Wear NE8 1AX

Tel: 0191 478 9200

Email: info@thelawnmowers.co.uk

Registered Charity No: 1084229 Ltd. Co. No: 3995521