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INTRODUCTION

This report provides a summary of the scope, range and impacts of work carried out to support the development of LGBTQIA+ arts and artists in Bradford since 2020. It particularly focuses on the work by Bradford Producing Hub and Sonia Sandhu in the role of LGBTQIA+ Arts Instigator, however it also references wider sector developments over the period.

BPH delivery period: March 2020 to March 2024.

LGBTQIA+ Arts Instigator Role period: Jan 2023 - September 2023 (2 days per week) / September 2023 - March 2024 (3 days per month)

This report is written by Sonia Sandhu with the support of Lisa Mallaghan. The 'I' / first person language in this report refers to Sonia.

Background and development of LGBTQIA+ Arts Instigator role

I had previously worked on short freelance contracts as Local Associate Producer with Marlborough Productions (Brighton) on their 'New Queers on the Block' scheme, in partnership with Theatre in the Mill (2018, 2020, 2022) and Bradford Producing Hub (2022).

In 2022, after a national call out, 4 queer artists were awarded £12K residencies over a 6-month period. 2 of the artists spent some time in Bradford, and I organised their schedules of activities, meetings, and one workshop activity, based on their research interests and artistic practices.

While this programme was beneficial to the artists involved, the BPH Creativity Council raised that they didn't feel that there had been sufficient positive impact from the scheme for LGBTQIA+ artists and audiences in Bradford. With BPH's support I lead on creating a call out for a seed commission opportunity of £3K, to support a cultural activity in Bradford for the local LGBTQIA+ community. This went to OUT OUT - a series of drag king workshops and a performance event which took place in April '23.

When evaluating this role with BPH, I expressed that there continued to be a missed opportunity in directly supporting more local LGBTQIA+ identifying artists. This fed into the development of the LGBTQIA+ Arts Instigator role.

Around the same time, Richard Dunbar and Rosie Freeman published their report commissioned by Bradford Council - '**How can we support and develop LGBTQ+ Arts in the Bradford District?**', September 2022. BPH agreed to reallocate existing funds and put in place a 1-year instigator role in order to progress on the following from their report:

Recommendations

- *Create a Bradford District queer creatives professional arts **network** that is easy to join and access support from when needed. This should not require a gatekeeper to give you access but instead perhaps a broad agreement to engage in inclusive practice. Support offered by this network should consider how NPOs and funded organisations work with queer creatives whilst simultaneously maintaining the independence, integrity and empowerment of the DIY culture whilst funding that work.*
- *Create a single accessible **online space** to find out about queer culture as well as occasional newsletters.*
- *Develop a framework for uplifting marginalised queer artists and developing queer **leadership** in the arts sector more widely. In order to prevent gate keepers from controlling this agenda a non-hierarchical approach to culture should be encouraged. Events like Bradford Pride and LGBTQ+ History Month should especially be encouraged in this context.*
- *Support and publicly celebrate **events** that feature artists and producers that are representative of the varied intersections of LGBTQ+ identities.*
- *Celebrate Queer **heritage**. Keep telling the stories, whether they're of protest or celebration. Inkbrew Productions serve as a good example of this ([here](#)) as well as the recent West Yorkshire Queer Stories project. We recommend funds are allocated for the introduction of a Queer Heritage Instigator to align with current Council Strategies and ensure the rich, radical and important LGBTQ+ stories are not lost. This work could also be done by the LGBTQ+ Arts coordinator, as recommended below.*
- *Introduce a Queer **Safe Spaces** charter that cultural orgs and venues can sign up to.*
- *Resource an LGBTQ+ Arts **coordinator** to progress the recommendations as set out in this report, and build on this work, further supporting the sector in the Bradford District. This could be done via Bradford Producing Hub's instigator scheme.*
- *Consider a creative **commission** that responds to and progresses the findings, and supports those that identify as LGBTQ+. This should be inclusive of intersecting and marginalised identities. This resource and opportunity could be managed by the LGBTQ+ coordinator above.*

DELIVERY AND IMPACTS OVERVIEW

The following section demonstrates some of the key areas of development and impact over the period:

Leadership:

EMPOWERED: LGBTQIA+ Artists, April '23

Following a programme lead by Creative Instigator Nicole Joseph for Global Majority Artists, I designed a 3-day programme for 12 northern based LGBTQIA+ artists. This aimed to build solidarity, collaboration and community between artists across multiple artforms at different stages in their careers. Lead by 3 LGBTQIA+ identifying creative facilitators and 1 wellbeing support facilitator, the cohort explored the following themes across the programme:

- Agency, consent and making informed choices
- Communication in a group setting; how we take care of ourselves and each other
- The good, the bad, the ugly: space for collective and individual lived experiences, with a focus on how to put this to use in informing allies in ways to be more lucid and accountable when implementing LGBTQIA+ inclusion in their programming, artist development, and general interactions with LGBTQIA+ artists.
- Creating community: nurturing the creativity of ourselves and others. Zine making activity, speed collaboration activity, discussing next steps and useful ways to move forward as a group.
- Hearing from the leaders: 4 online talks from northern queer artistic leaders (Jaivant Patel, Kate O'Donnell, Gilly Roche, Suriya Aisha) held Q&As and shared discussion prompts with the group.
- Go & See trip: finished the programme with a group trip to see Jaivant Patel's *Waltzing the Blue Gods* premiere in Bradford.

Feedback from the cohort:

"A very much-needed session. And didn't feel stifled too. Everyone had a voice, without the fear of being too-much; that is usually attributed to the LGBTQIA+ community. I also quite enjoyed the audience-led format, I always clamour for it with my own practice. Even though there were guest speakers and facilitators to preside the event, the participants were much of an anchor too."

"This programme has given me tools and conversations that I never knew I needed, I am so very glad that I decided to apply for it. Every member of this group was so supportive, it really feels like something special will come out of this group in the future. I feel proud of how I acted in these sessions and how I've grown from being a part of this programme."

"Overall I really loved the programme. The facilitators were all great. I particularly enjoyed how different each of their personal communication styles were as it showed a range of expressions of leadership."

"It made me feel like there are like-minds that yearn for democracy on the Queer arts table."

Since the programme...

All of the artists that took part have since engaged in further training and development opportunities via BPH.

The discussions and responses generated during the programme were anonymised and are feeding into BPH's ongoing Artists Charter strand of work.

Almost a year later and the Empowered WhatsApp group is still lively and connected, with artists collaborating on projects, sharing events, opportunities, information about their upcoming work and arranging social events together. Many discovered new creative collaborators within the group, others became more connected to the Bradford arts scene and have worked on projects with Freedom Studios and Displace Yourself Theatre.

I worked as co-producer on Theatre in the Mill's Right Queer Right Now festival in Feb'24, and have been encouraging a more joined up approach to connections between arts organisations and queer artists supported via BPH. I put forward two artists from the Empowered cohort for seed commissions, who were able to develop their creative ideas and showcase them during the festival. Theatre in the Mill are keen to keep supporting them.

Commissions and Events:

MAKE THE CHANGE, September '23

I co-produced this large-scale event which celebrated the Empowered programme and artists, bringing together our cohorts of Global Majority and LGBTQIA+ artists.

All of the artists who took part in BPH's Empowered programmes were offered a £400 micro commission and wrap-around support, in response to the prompt 'what does change mean to you?'. They could use this to work on a creative idea to be shared as part of the Make the Change event, or put the funds towards creating change for themselves ie- towards training or mentoring as an aspiring artistic leader.

11 from the LGBTQIA+ cohort took this up:

- 3 put the funds towards mentoring or training (playwriting facilitation / identity and neurodivergence / strategic exec director training)
- 8 worked on new creative ideas (including a film making collaboration between movement, spoken word and visual artists, new visual artworks, and live art)

The short film collaboration and reflective blog posts from the artists will all be showcased on the BPH website as a legacy of Make the Change.

A creative who used the funds towards a strategic exec director training opportunity, achieved her creative ambition of stepping up her career from a producer to a CEO of an NPO arts organisation.

One of the visual artists is an international student, asked BPH for a formal letter of support towards her Global Talent Application, which has been approved, and this artist continues to engage with BPH programmes.

BPH Commissions:

While the NQOTB partnership offered the only LGBTQIA+ specific commissions, BPH have also supported a number of new LGBTQIA+ focused works through their Make Work commissions, including:

- Carlos Pons Guerra's The Bull and the Moon (Make Work Commission)
- Sid Akhbar's Besharam (Shame-LESS) (Make Work Commission)
- Kamal Kaan's Love Story on Leeds Road (Make Work R&D)
- Marina Poppa's Drag development (Explore Commission)
- Chris Cambell's Queer poetry and photography development (Explore Commission)

Networks:

Queer Arts North

BPH joined the Queer Arts North Network in March '23, and I have attended meetings each quarter. The network members – 10 representatives of queer led arts organisations across the north - came in person to Bradford and took part in the Make the Change event in Sept '23. We have been able to share each other's resources in promoting events and training opportunities. We co-developed a survey for LGBTQIA+ identifying artists to complete, on the type of support they need from the network partners, which closes at the end of March '24.

LGBTQIA+ Creatives Gatherings

I arranged monthly gatherings for LGBTQIA+ identifying creatives and artists as a space to provide the opportunity to meet new collaborators, discuss opportunities, share work, and seek career advice. These ran in March - May '23, and September '23 - Jan '24, with an average attendance of 8 per session, and 65 attendances overall, from 32 creative practitioners.

Local creatives have shared works in progress and sought feedback from peers during these meets, and I have brought a round up of relevant news and local opportunities relating to funding and training. 6 artists who came to these hadn't engaged with BPH programmes before.

In June '23, in place of the usual meet, I arranged a preview event for BPH Make Work artist Sid Akbar's show 'Besharam [shame-LESS]', which 25 people attended.

I supported by specifically connecting with local QTPOC audiences in Bradford. Sid's performance and post show Q&A event created a safe and welcoming space for individuals from these communities. The audience's engagement was not only marked by enthusiasm but also by a deep resonance with the themes explored in the performance. Sid expressed how positive and impactful this was for him, to share a personal piece of work in his home town amongst his community.

In July '23, in place of the usual meet, I arranged a Go & See trip to HOME in Manchester, to see a panel talk 'The Future of Trans Art' organised by Trans Creative. 15 people attended this. Trans Creative's artistic director Kate O'Donnell was a speaker on the Empowered programme, so we had the opportunity to meet in person along with some of the cohort.

"The discussion was extremely interesting and inspiring. Whilst in that space it felt like future possibilities for humankind - a great vision; I was quite swept up in it! It has pointed me towards really useful research as I work on the script of my play - Thanks for the idea of taking the group over there."

Wider Sector Development And Partnerships:

Equity Partnership

BPH has been connected with Equity Partnership throughout the development period. My original contract was due to end in September '23 at the end of BPH's pilot funding, however it was clear there was still a need for the role. BPH approached Equity Partnership who kindly agreed to fund my role for a further 6-months, to March '24. At the same time, Equity Partnership have been strengthening their own creative arts provision, including the introduction of regular visual arts & crafts groups.

NQOTB & Right Queer Right Now

Marlborough Productions (Brighton) continue to take an interest in and support the development of the LGBTQIA+ arts sector in Bradford, providing seed funding opportunities for local artists through Theatre in the Mill's RQRN festival. I co-produced this and was able to link up opportunities for artists I have supported through BPH. I programmed a range of events as part of the festival, including drag queen Lady Bushra's first ever homecoming show in Bradford, and brought CAMP (a queer wrestling cabaret show) to Bradford which drew in new audiences who had traveled to the city for the first time.

The festival in 2024 ran across two weekenders, showcasing work from local and national LGBTQIA+ artists. Theatre in the Mill plan to run this again in 2025 and 2026.

Queer Joy Bradford

Off the back of Usman Ahmed's seed commission at RQRN festival, a new collective has formed led by QTIPOC producers / event organisers in Bradford, which I am a part of. The focus is to bring more South Asian, South East Asian, and Black led, celebratory queer events to Bradford. We are organising regular meetups, to plan, reach audiences, and seek funding to put on our own day festival of activities.

PROUD: BD

There has been positive progress in Bradford's Pride offer. In Summer '23, Bradford Council launched Proud:BD, a month-long festival of arts and cultural events leading up to Pride Day. Lead producer, Alice Parsons, programmed a diverse lineup of events, including high profile acts on Pride Day; The Bitten Peach Collective, Ginny Lemon, The Cheeky Girls. Pride Day in City Park was very well attended, with many young people and families making up the audience. There are plans to run the festival again this year. In my Instigator role I contributed to early planning through the steering group, and BPH covered the access costs for the festival.

Castles In The Sky

During this period, Alice Parsons (recipient of the commission for OUT OUT) formally registered her company 'Castles In The Sky' as a CIC and is now establishing the organisation as a hub for LGBTQIA+ arts in Bradford. Alice has a range of ambitions, including talent development programmes, commissions and a LGBTQIA+ venue / meeting space. BPH is continuing to support Alice in this development period.

SUMMARY

LGBTQIA+ Arts Instigator Role:

With BPH's support and resources, in the role of LGBTQIA+ Arts Instigator, I have been able to:

- Provide one to one support, advice and signposting towards training and funding opportunities to individual artists / producers / creatives
- Created spaces where artists have been able to connect to find peer support, new collaborators and strengthened social connections when going seen inspiring queer live work and talks together
- Develop commissioning opportunities
- Be in dialogue with local queer producers about their events and projects, support through BPH via marketing, audience reach, funding towards access costs
- Advocate for a more joined up approach between arts organisations and artists; putting forward queer artists for commission opportunities, suggesting arts organisations consult with BPH when programming queer work at their venues
- Be on the steering group for Bradford Pride in 2023, support with access costs via BPH
- I estimate I have supported 130 LGBTQIA+ Creatives through this work

BPH Investment:

Since Oct 2020, BPH has invested over **£98,612** in LGBTQIA specific development, including:

- NQOTB Partnership
- Make Work Commissions – full productions & R&D
- Instigator role
- Empowered Programme
- Make the Change Event & Commissions
- Go & Sees

NB: This summary only includes the LGBTQIA+ *specific* work, and doesn't include the LGBTQIA+ creatives that have generally been supported across our wider programmes of training and funding offered by BPH (inc. Spare Bob, Mentoring, Expanding Horizons, Transforming Spaces, Producer & Production Management training etc). Therefore, BPH's overall investment in the LGBTQIA+ creative community is far greater still overall.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With the funds for the LGBTQIA+ Instigator role coming to an end, to maintain the growth of Bradford's LGBTQIA+ arts scene and address more of the recommendations set out by the 2022 report, I would suggest resourcing towards:

1. **Investing in / supporting the development of a queer-led arts organisation** which aims to produce events alongside artist development opportunities, and can continue support and sector growth for the long-term
2. **Supporting the development of a safe space** where LGBTQIA+ creatives can meet
3. **NPO and organisational development training** for small queer led companies so they can expand their scale and ambition
4. **Training on LGBTQIA+ inclusivity** for arts organisations across Bradford
5. **Maintaining the partnership with Queer Arts North**
6. **Continuing to strengthen and embed Proud:BD** in the annual events calendar, including more multi-artform commissions that share our culture and heritage
7. **Revisit 'How can we support and develop LGBTQ+ Arts in the Bradford District?' report** (September 2022) with CBMDC and local arts organisations in Bradford
8. **Develop specific LGBTQIA+ Arts KPI within Culture is Our Plan**
9. **Respond to recommendations from Queer Arts North survey**