

Name of your Organisation:	Cherwell Theatre Company
Name of the project TFN funded:	Pete Stays Home
Date Funded by TFN:	06/11/2020
Were you able to undertake your project as planned?	Yes
If no, please outline how the project has changed.	
Can you describe and/or demonstrate the specific impact that TFN funding has had against your initial objectives?	<u>Overview</u> Cherwell Theatre Company (CTC) have strong, established working relationships with several primary schools across the Cherwell District and particularly in the "Brighter Futures" wards of Banbury which see a high level of deprivation. During the COVID-19, pandemic, closure of schools and ongoing restrictions have increased anxiety and isolation among children and "Pete Stays Home" was designed to help children deal with and process the emotions that this extraordinary time has brought. "Pete Stays Home" is a 2020 picture book by Oxfordshire Author Karra Macfarlane, which tells the story of a bear who must hibernate through the winter with his mother. Pete cannot leave his cave and misses seeing his friends and grandparents. The story, adapted into an interactive musical by CTC in 2021, enables children and adults to have open and honest conversations about their recent experiences, seen through Pete's perspective. <u>The Process</u> This interactive theatre project was devised and produced collaboratively over several weeks with a professional cast and creative team, 22 students aged 16-18 and 33 young people aged 11-25. Following the announcement of a third UK lockdown in January 2021, the dates for rehearsals and performances, which had been planned between April and May were rescheduled to June and July 2021 and parts of the project were adapted to take place online. Following exploratory online devising workshops delivered over the Zoom app with students and young people in February, a script was written by playwright Renata Allen and songs were composed by CTC Artistic Director Tristan Jackson-Pate and actor Joshua Baldwin. Interactive workshop videos for children were created and shot by Activate Learning Students and produced and edited by professional

filmmaker Jonathan Ruffle of Fresh FX media. They were then disseminated to 9 schools and 2 early years centres, so that teachers and nursery staff could facilitate activities with the children prior to our tour.

In June 2021, students and young people joined a socially distanced 2 week face to face research and development/devising process and a week of rehearsals. They participated in a variety of roles, from set designers and builders to community theatre facilitators and performer/devisers.

Our three actor-facilitators then brought the story to life on school fields, in playgrounds, under gazebos and in well ventilated halls throughout July. The interactive performance we created featured storytelling, clowning and physical comedy, music, craft, dance and drama activities.

Key Statistics

Participants

22 students from Banbury College (aged 16-18) and 33 young people aged 11-25 from CTC's Youth Theatre and Young Company took part in the project.

Audiences

Pete Stays Home toured to the following locations with the following audience numbers in attendance:

- The Sunshine Centre: 28
- East Street Early Years Centre: 42
- Longford Park School: 34
- William Morris School: 28
- Hardwick School: 29
- St Mary's School: 55
- Hill View School: 58 (2 performances for year 1 classes)
- Glory Farm School: 56 (2 performances for year 1 classes)
- St Leonard's School: 69 (2 performances for year 1 classes)
- St Joseph's School: 55 (2 performances for year 1 classes)

We also staged public performances at People's Park in the centre of Banbury. We limited tickets to 50 audience members per show in line with our COVID-19 risk assessment. 132 audience members who had booked enjoyed the performances and we estimate a further 50-80 people stopped to watch the performances from a distance.

Total Audience: 586 plus an additional 50-80 in People's Park.

Summary of Progress (evaluation of aims and outcomes)

	Aim 1: Deliver 10 half day workshops in Cherwell primary schools and 3 in early years centres reaching 350 audience members. Due to the rescheduling of project dates and individual school's COVID-19 risk assessments, we ended up offering multiple performances to fewer schools but reaching a greater number of children than we had anticipated (586 as opposed to 350). We also offered 12 half day workshops as opposed to the planned 10, to accommodate schools who required 2 performances to cater to individual class "bubbles". As one of our Early Years Centre performances was not able to take place, we elected to stage performances in People's Park, which were an undoubted success, reaching diverse audiences of local people in Banbury. "I was pleased to see a lot of South Asian families sitting down to watch the show," said Deborah Howe (CTC trustee) of the People's Park event, "it shows the work we've been doing in partnership with Banbury Mosque is working to reach that community, and I suspect that not as many of these families would have attended had the performance been in a theatre space." Aim 2: Develop the interactive performance and online workshop activities in collaboration with young people. Young people remain at the heart of CTC's programme and were instrumental in the planning, delivery and evaluation of this project. They took part in the online development process attending initial devising, script reading/feedback sessions and music workshops, where they collaboratively wrote songs which were featured in the final piece. They also attended rehearsals, helping to workshop sections of movement and drama within the performance, with the actors and creative team in June. Feedback included: "I come to CTC every week as part of the Monday sessions. It's always the best part of the week. I've been involved with Pete Stays Home since the start of the year helping develop songs and stuff." "We've been helping - giving feedback - this was the first I saw of it in person and it looks really good." "It seems weird to say but it's actually the best time I've had in a long time - it's kind of amazing [as a deviser] to just feel like a five year old again." Aim 3: Offer work experience for Banbury College students in performing arts, media and art and design. This is the first project CTC has led in partnership with Activate Learning in which students from multiple creative courses have been
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	able to collaborate over a sustained period of time, in a variety of roles on a professional theatre project. All students completed work experience assignments alongside the project, overseen by CTC staff and Activate Learning course leads. Though Performing Arts students told us they are interested in a variety of creative careers, from acting to design to applied theatre, they have had no opportunity to work with professional companies or theatre venues during the COVID-19 pandemic. In "Pete Stays Home" Performing Arts students worked closely with our professional team in the devising and "workshopping" of the play itself, with several electing to work closely with the set and costume designer Rachael Twyford in building and painting the set, sourcing costume and props. "It's great to get to build set - not something I've been able to do on the course so far." - Student. Prior to the face to face work, Performing Arts students attended online workshops in devising community and applied theatre with CTC's outreach Co-ordinator Sophie Beckinsale, Music Composition and Dramaturgy workshops with CTC's Artistic Director Tristan Jackson-Pate and actor-composer Joshua Baldwin and voice acting/presenting workshops with professional voice over artists Jess Lloyd-Jones and Krage Brown (whose credits include the Tellytubbies and current children's TV series Sunnybank Allotments). Feedback included: "It was great to work with actual professionals" and "I learned that there are a lot more roles in design than I thought". Students devised and scripted the video workshops in February and March, which were then filmed in June. 2 Media students took part in the filming of the videos for schools and 3 Media Make Up students designed and applied the make up for the professional actors. This is the first time we have connected with the media make up department and the students were fantastic to work with. As such we offered subsequent work experience placements for our community theatre tour of "MYTH II" in August. Below are extracts from case studies compiled by Sophie Beckinsale, reflecting select student's work during the devising process, which was submitted as part of their work experience reports. "Every time we have worked with Lauren, she has been fully engaged and asks many pertinent questions. Lauren takes great care to look out for the end goal and is driven and focused. Lauren worked hard and was able to record her element quickly meaning she had a lot of time to work with other groups and support them. She always gives
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well thought out feedback. I think the voice over workshop was good for Lauren not only with delivery but with her confidence. She initially described her voice as "broken" which was definitely not the case by the end of the workshop with Jess Lloyd-Jones, when she fully committed herself to the role of a storyteller and was visibly beaming at her own progress."

"In any session, Arson instantly stands out as someone who is fully engaged and responsive. They are very much a leader in the group, often volunteering to share back work first or to improvise work on the spot in front of their peers. Arson's performance style is versatile and when telling the story, their voice was very soothing to listen too. Arson takes responsibility for the work their group is producing by volunteering to take on the extra work like script writing. I believe Arson could pursue Theatre in Education work and be very successful in it."

Aim 4: Create a short film documenting the project complete with digital teachers resource packs.

Digital resources were made available to all schools and early years centres via online links before the tour. The resulting documentary film has been produced by Jonathan Ruffle of Fresh FX Media and will be screened for partners and funders at lock 29 Banbury in October 2021. It will be made available to view free of charge online thereafter.

Aim 5: Encourage young people and their families to talk about their feelings around lockdown.

This was a key aim for this project and central to CTC's mission throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been to put young people's well-being first and to provide activities and platforms to reflect and express themselves during a very challenging time. It is also key to our partnership with the authors of the book, Karra McFarlane and Kim Hankinson who said: "This project has been special because children have been at home for such a long time. There are 5 and 6 year olds who have never seen anything like this because they haven't been the age when they've had the opportunity. So, they've got the joy of watching theatre and an experience they've really lived that they're going to see come alive" - Karra McFarlane.

"It was nice to see people coming together and having fun which is not something we've seen a lot during the last 18 months," said Kim Hankinson after seeing the first performance. "There were sad bits and thoughtful bits too, bits to get excited and for the children to play

	together. It was amazing to see them go through all the emotions really". In our research and development process, we found the performance could provide a way in both for children, parents and teachers to see their experiences reflected: "Pete is a young character so he mirrors what the kids have been feeling and will be feeling at this time," said Ines, who played Pete. "I loved the playfulness of Pete," said Renata Allen, the playwright. "Ines has really got into the mind of being a child. What's lovely about children is that they have so many complicated emotions and she seems to capture all the different things that they can feel, naughty things, good things, the excitement, the fear, she just has such a range". Jenny Johns, a former early years teacher who played Pete's Mum and other characters in the play said: "I think everyone can recognise the bears going into hibernation as lockdown and can identify with Pete when he is told he can't see his friends and that he can't go out as it was confusing and hard. In the show "Mumma Bear" finds it hard to keep Pete entertained and happy and I'm sure that's been parent's stories up and down the country over the lockdown". Many of our partners commented that they were surprised at how much the young children had engaged with the play's prescient themes: "They engaged brilliantly, some of them were only 2 and it's hard to sit for a 50 minute show but we were pleasantly surprised that they were able to do that!" said Theresa Baker, East Street Early Years Centre Manager, who worked with us for the first time on this project, "I think they will learn huge amounts from watching it that they can talk about with their parents when they go home". Indeed, Karra McFarlane kindly donated 50 books for the children who attended early years settings to take home with them, to read with their families and reflect on their experiences further. Audience members commented that the play was successful in sparking these conversations gently: "the story is absolutely amazing. It was the easiest way to get the point across and I found it quite emotional actually". "It made you reflect, it really brought it home how bad things have been, but now hopefully we're coming out of it and moving forward with life." The project had different reactions in each setting. After the St Mary's School performance, Jenny commented: "I love how [the children]
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interact with the songs. In the "butterflies song" Pete asks lots of questions and the children in schools have started responding to them. It shows that they're really listening to the lyrics".

"In the schools you see the kids raw experience reflected but in a park you see the parents and grandparents too," said Tristan. "Today I've looked out and seen a couple of people hugging their kids a little more tightly or wiping away a tear as they reflect on the eighteen months we've all lived through".

Aim 6: Increase confidence and well-being amongst children and young people.

Throughout the pandemic, CTC's engagement with young people online and in person, in schools and community centres has remained consistent, with many reporting CTC has helped to increase their well-being: "CTC has been a lifeline to my child," said a parent in 2020, grateful for the variety of free creative engagement opportunities the company has provided.

"I know this will sound over exaggerated," said a 14 year old who participated in the research and development process for "Pete Stays Home", "but it made me feel so happy being a child again".

The interactive performance itself was designed to build confidence in young audiences, knowing that many of the children in attendance would never have seen a theatre production before, and wouldn't necessarily know how to engage with it: "We've built in a lot of bits where the children are able to make suggestions and we will incorporate them," said Tristan, "So the children find their confidence as the show progresses, but they know from the start that they will be heard and are able to influence the show."

"It was definitely a good choice to make the videos with the students introducing the characters and the story before we attended each school as it clearly built excitement and expectation amongst the children, they knew who Pete was and they couldn't wait to meet him," said Josh Baldwin, who played Gramps, "it was also great to have their collages of the bears on the set and to read their letters to Pete out, it really helped them feel included."

Michelle and Jill Senior Outreach worker and Manager at The Sunshine Centre respectively commented on the inclusivity of the piece: "They (the actors) were really good with the children [there was] good eye contact and the [Makaton] signing really made it for us, we use signing a lot. The little ones were loving it. They were joining in - they found Grandma and Gramps before they were meant to which

	was really funny. They were fixated. There was no misbehaviour, or children getting up, it really held their attention, from babies to 4 year olds". "You could see how happy the children were. They were just full of it. They all got up, they weren't at all phased with the joining in," said Jemma Kerby, East Street Early Years Centre's Educational Director. At our final performances at people's Park Banbury, the actors enjoyed getting whole families involved. "I'm a councillor at Cherwell District Council on the well-being team," said Councillor Andrew McHugh who attended the performance, "we are particularly keen to support projects like this which help everyone with getting back to normal. The only thing I wasn't quite so keen on was doing press ups!" Children's feedback from attending this event included: "It was lots of fun" "My favourite part was the games" "[I liked] their facial expressions, their voices were so clear!" Parent feedback included: "It was very sweet and very nice and I think the kids enjoyed it" "I'd love to see more stuff like this in Banbury" <u>Lessons Learned and Further Life</u> During this project CTC has developed new fruitful relationships with partners such as East Street Early Years Centre: "It's been amazing, we can't fault it. [Tristan has] been brilliant from start to finish and we're talking to him about doing more projects together in the community room here" - Theresa Baker. This project has also undoubtedly developed our practice in inclusive theatre making with and for young people. We have done this by working with new artistic collaborators, integrating Makaton and interactive music into our storytelling and trailing new community applied theatre techniques developed by Sophie Beckinsale, which have given the children a unique experience beyond the production itself: "By advising Pete [in the workshops and performance] the kids have learned to be empathetic, that's a really nice thing to have given them," said Josh.
What portion of the project did TFN fund?	25%

TFN Impact Report

How many direct beneficiaries did the TFN funded project reach?	55
How many indirect beneficiaries did the TFN funded project reach?	586
Were you able to leverage further funding as a result of TFN support?	Yes
If yes, how much were you able to raise?	Funder £ Cherwell District Council Arts Budget 3500 Cherwell District Council- Cherwell Lottery Fund 1000 Project Spark 2000 Split Infinitive Trust 300 Sanctuary Housing 3000 Souldern Trust 500 Noel Coward Foundation 2964 St Michael's Charities 2185 Banbury Town Council 500 Lord Faingdon's Trust 500 Bartlett Taylor CT 500 Woodward CT 780 Foyle Foundation 2500 TOTAL £20,229
Did you receive any pro-bono support, volunteer offers or introductions as a result of the event?	Yes
If yes, please can you provide details of the support you received?	1 volunteer offer
Has the training you received from TFN better prepared you in pitching your organisation to potential funders?	Yes
Has TFN increased your capacity to raise further funds?	Yes

How important was TFN funding in helping you achieve your objectives?	We wouldn't have been able to achieve our objectives without TFN funding
Since presenting at TFN, has your organisation undergone any other significant changes?	We have continued to grow and increase our engagement with our community even during covid-19. We have now created a new staff role, an outreach project manager to cope with the demand for projects! Following our evaluation, we have worked with our partners to explore the project's further life. With the continued support of Cherwell District Council and Sanctuary Housing we are pleased to say the play will tour again from October-November 2021 taking in more schools and community settings in Cherwell as well as visiting selected theatre spaces. Having invested in the initial development of the production, we can now roll the project out to more children and young people at a relatively low cost and visiting theatre venues, where the production will be ticketed will help to subsidise further schools' performances across our district.
Do you have any other comments or feedback on the experience of the TFN process?	Thank you so much to Jennie for her wonderful support throughout the project, especially in developing the pitch which has gone on to be useful for many other pitches and funding applications! It was a dream to work with you all.
Can you tell us any personal stories to highlight the value of the project?	See above!