



## Report back to YFN

### 1. Name of your organisation and date funded by YFN:

Mouthy Poets – June 2016

### 2. What does your organisation do?

#### History

Mouthy Poets was founded in 2011 by Deborah 'Debris' Stevenson, whilst studying at Nottingham University. She found there was no spoken word collective in Nottingham and that there were many disillusioned young people who needed a voice and could benefit from being given tools to express themselves. The collective has grown ever since and is now making national and international links.

Mouthy Poets is a collective of 15 -30 year olds in Nottingham who write, edit and perform their own poetry as well as producing events, teaching poetry and helping each other to develop personally and professionally.

As a Community Interest Company, we are primarily concerned with educating and developing the vocabulary and skills of young people through the spoken word. Often hardship and isolation from the 'norm' gives young people a story and a need for catharsis: there isn't vocabulary for their experiences, so they must develop their own.

Mouthy Poets trains young people to produce and organise their own events and projects as a means of giving them concrete career skills and experiences.

There are 4 main aspects to our work:

#### Weekly Sessions

We meet every Friday evening during term time for a three hour session of writing, challenging, playing and learning.

#### Performing

Our participants write, produce and perform two major spoken word shows every year (in the Spring and in the Summer) at Nottingham Playhouse. These are called Say Sum Thin and showcase our work as well as that of guest artists and educators.

We produce other events throughout the year and Mouthys can often be found all over the East Midlands performing at open mic nights, curated shows and festivals.

We completed a tour in 2014/15 and have performed in Germany alongside a sister collective in Braunschweig. We also have connections with poetry collective InZync in Stellenbosch SA and have performed via Skype with them.

#### Education

Mouthy Poets deliver tailored spoken word education in a range of school and community settings.

#### Professional Development

We support emerging artists to develop their professional practice and experience in the education, arts and performance sectors. We also train participants to facilitate large and small-scale events, festivals and projects to a professional standard.

We do all this through masterclasses, professional representation and facilitating and funding relevant training.

Through our work we reach thousands of people; audiences, participants, followers, whom we encourage to articulate their own differences and listen to those of others. Mouthy is a young and growing organisation that aspires to share its ethos and sense of empowerment as far and wide as possible.

### **3. Can you describe/measure the impact that the specific YFN funded project/work has had?**

The YFN funding financed a relationship between two British Sign Language practitioners and Mouthy Poets, culminating in two live performances at Nottingham Playhouse in July 2016 –one in the studio and one on the main stage.

This project enabled us to pay for 2 signers as opposed to 1 and also paid for extra hours for the signers to attend rehearsals and time to read scripts and engage with performers over a longer period of time.

Having 2 signers meant that an individual performer could build a closer rapport with their signer and the signer could concentrate on each piece allocated to them more fully. Our shows are very intense and having 2 signers meant that each signer could take breaks and so be fully engaged with each piece they signed.

Individual participants were able to discuss the emotion behind their pieces, so allowing the signers to deliver the best translation possible. Participants were able to fully understand the process a signer has to go through in order to capture the essence of a performance. This not only gave us all a fuller understanding of the process of signing but also sparked interest in translation of texts into other languages and forms.

Participants and audiences noted that the signers performance was as moving to watch as it was to listen to the words performed by the poets.

Building a relationship with signers enabled us to discuss all aspects of the performance with them, from movement, lighting, through to tone and pace. As we endeavour to develop our participants into the best performers they can possibly be, we found the project really added to their understanding of an audience experience.

We struggle to engage with the local deaf community and welcome any support to enable us to reach a wider audience. Because the signers have seen at close quarters the level of work we produce and what we are trying to achieve, we are hoping to forge stronger links with the deaf community in the future.

Unfortunately we do not have any data which indicates the number of hearing impaired audience members who would have benefited from the BSL signing.

Some comments from evaluation/feedback:

*"It means a lot to me that so much effort was put in to make the shows accessible for all. As someone with a disability, who has disabled friends, accessibility issues are something which I am frequently having to navigate and it is all too often the case that there are things one or more of us can't do. It was wonderful to have signers because it speaks of an inclusive ethos which is part of the foundations of the Mouthy Poets Collective."*

Mid Shelley, participant/performer

*"At times I couldn't take my eyes off the signer. Her face was so expressive and the way her hands drew the words being spoken, was amazing!"*

Audience member (from feedback/evaluation form)

### **4. Could you give us an estimate of how many people have been reached by the YFN funded project/work and by how much?**

50 participants/performers – worked with the signers over a period of 2 weeks.

4 tech staff from Nottingham Playhouse over the day of performances.

Studio audience of 60 during a 60 minute show.

Auditorium audience of 400 during a 120 minute show.

**5. Can you tell us any personal stories to highlight the value of funding from YFN?**

For one participant, Daisy-Rose Nimerovski, who has a daughter who is deaf, the relationship was particularly rewarding as her daughter could fully engage with the work her mum had been doing and the work of the collective. She felt included in the world which her mother is part of.

Daisy-Rose attended the event in London in June and pitched for the funding and this was as much a part of the process and sense of involvement as actually winning the funding. To be able to pitch to a group of strangers and have them support her pitch was a great moment for her, and her daughter – proof that other people care.

**6. Do you have any other comments regarding YFN funding?**

To be able to request funding for a specific project enabled us to ensure that the project was fulfilled – in a wider funding bid the details of a project can often be lost – in this case we pitched to support for support in making our performance accessible to a new group of people and were able to deliver that.

**7. Can you please include any relevant photos or clips that may relate to the project.**

This is a link to a promo film for Say Sum Thin 9 - which included the two performances we had BSL signed thanks to YTFN funding. There are parts of the show in the clip that show the signers on stage with us. We often use video clips to take screen shots and so have great still images for future use.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/8yac9osl47t2tli/Say%20Sum%20Thin%209%20Promo.mp4?dl=0>

here are a couple of stills from the show



