

# **Running a Youth Theatre: Pastoral Care and Supporting Young People**

**with Nathan Powell and Donna Coleman from 20 Stories High**

## **Tue 12 Mar – Session Summary**

### **Introduction**

- Hello from Gabi (Company Three)
- Hello from Nathan (Producer) and Donna (Youth Worker) at 20 Stories High, who will be leading the session
- This session will look at how 20 Stories High approach pastoral work and how we support young people through programme.
- 20 Stories High are 18 years old – developed and made to work with and for working class and diverse young people. A lot of the people we work with have historically and are currently being excluded from theatre, and have barriers around accessing theatre and art. So that pastoral work and support is particularly important for us.

**Ice breaker in the chat:** things that brought us joy in the past week: a new puppy, a friend's 8 month old, kids dressing up for world book day, watching a show/comedy, child's birthday, national trust trip with mum, breakfast in bed on mothers day and more.

### **Pastoral Care and Supporting Young People at 20 Stories High**

#### **The roles at 20 Stories High:**

- Youth Worker – Donna started off doing the odd session, which became 2 days a week and now 4 days a week, as we realised the support needed with our young people.
- Pastoral Support Worker – both present in sessions. There to support from a pastoral perspective and are the designated safeguarding leads in those spaces if anything needs to be addressed or escalated. (Freelance)
- Work closely with a mental health practitioner at CAHMS with situations that are more complex – always good to have people outside you can go to
- We are not counsellors – but are able to support and signpost

#### **What we offer:**

- Offer support to young people depending on the content of the show and whether that could be triggering – always have a mental health first aid table with some resources to hand
- Have monthly safeguarding meetings with the team, as well as responding to situations as they arise

- Access riders – when young people join they're asked to fill out an access rider so we know how to best support them.
- Have an initial 1:1 with young people to get to know them, ask them what support they might need inside or outside of sessions, how things are going with school or college, what they're interested in. Sometimes help them to fill in the access rider.
- Do this with young people of all ages.
- Have a participation phone, which we use to send information about sessions in our Whatsapp group with the young people. But during long breaks like Christmas, we'll send signpost lists so if anyone's struggling over those periods, they have somewhere to go.

Questions so far:

- **How many youth theatres do you run?** One at the moment, regular weekly youth theatre with young people in Liverpool. Aged 14-21.
- **With the Whatsapp group, do you have any examples of additional safeguarding put in place to manage young people contacting each other?** Staff members are in the whatsapp group with work phones, have a code of conduct pinned to the Whatapp group which explains that its just for members, and often its about sharing information e.g. session times, seeing a show or trip. Of course it strays away from that, but we just remind them of the code of conduct. Not all young people have phones so sometimes a parent is in that chat.  
Also it's about being aware that the group is optional, and that young people will be talking on Whatsapp regardless of us. Do the best we can in terms of letting them be aware of child safety
- **Are young people referred in to you and if so how?** Different groups in the city refer young people to us, for us its about having a group which is representative of young people in Liverpool.
- **You mentioned having a CAMHS person coming to sessions – how did you set that up?** Really useful for helping us set boundaries and being able to refer young people in they need professional mental health support. So we get in touch and Carl (the CAMHS person) says he'll pop in and have a conversation.

**A regular weekly session:**

- Run from 7-9pm every Tuesday at a local theatre, Unity Theatre. But the doors are always open from 6.
- We have food and drinks set up for young people as they arrive, a mixture of healthy snacks and quick things to eat like pot noodles. We noticed lots of young people were arriving hungry but didn't want to talk about it, something lovely and communal about food being available to everyone.
- The whole staff team is there from 6, so pastoral workers, director, sometimes the producer. So we can check in before the session if we need to, and they can come to us for a chat if they want to.
- When we get into the space, we think about how its set up (e.g. clear place for people to put their stuff, music playing as people enter).

- Start with a check in with the young people and creative team – any updates or announcements of what we'll talk about that week. Space to share highlights or wonderful things that have happened that week.
- Create a manifesto together at the start of the term – something which comes from the young people about how they want to be in the space e.g. no ideas are bad ideas. We print it out and put it up every session. Something we can refer back to.
- All the support staff are there throughout the session.
- At the end, there's a bus fare available for anyone who wants it. Sometimes they talk to us about it beforehand or sometimes they tell you on the day they'd like the bus fare paid. Sometimes we provide taxis, if there's a specific reason why its important for that young people to get home in that way.
- After the session, there's time for the team to check in on anything they've noticed to pass onto Donna to pick up. Not always appropriate to stop the session to discuss these things, but this means we don't miss anything.

### **Breakout room activities:**

4 break out rooms had 10 minutes to discuss the following situations, before feeding back to the group:

#### **Scenario 1**

A young person comes into a session a bit later than they usually do, they look a bit flustered. They settle into the session, but you notice that they can't concentrate and are feeling overwhelmed and emotional. They leave the space; you follow them, and they tell you they are really struggling at school. They are finding the academics hard to keep up with and are struggling to manage their friendships.

- How would you approach this conversation?
- How would you offer support?
- What would you do after the conversation?

Feedback from group:

- Standard safeguarding procedures of not asking leading questions, absorbing information, logging it as a disclosure, and responding in the way your policy dictates.
- Discussed the organisations relationship with schools in the area, if you could contact school to see if there's any support available there.
- Could signpost to mental health support and find out how serious the situation is – deciding what's required based on that.
- Long term relationship – checking in with the young person down the line and supporting them more long term.
- Trying to understand whats going on in that friendship area – anything to make sure that person has really strong friendships within the group, like peer mentors, lunch buddies etc.

- Then had a longer conversation about supporting staff to deal with this in general – the weight of safeguarding and mental health support at the moment, how we might all support each other
- Also spoke about implementing the questions that might be beneficial for that young person, so they hear that others have those experiences. Challenging to do well, but maybe asking gentle questions about school at the start of the session in a way that doesn't feel direct.

## Scenario 2

You know that one of the participants does a lot of caring for their 4 younger siblings. Their parents work a lot and so they take on a lot of the day-to-day tasks and care for their siblings. Some of the group do an improvisation about family and carers, which causes this young person to cry. They are trying to hide their tears.

- What do you do?
- How would you offer support?
- Is there any follow up?

Feedback from group:

- Initially we'd see if the young person wanted to talk to somebody or if they wanted space out. Having a safe space available where they could go with someone to speak is important.
- Having an open and non-leading conversation with them, and then following up depending on what the child shares.
- Have lots of great networks we could signpost to like young carers or mental health support.
- Interesting question to think about depending on the size of the organisation. If you're 1 adult working with a group of young people its harder to handle a situation than if you're part of a larger organisation or building. So the way you would respond would be quite different.
- If you had a young person caring for 4 siblings, you'd already have a relationships with them or you'd be developing it.
- Spoke about preventing the situation coming about e.g. practitioners might try to steer away from things which are a trigger for some young people
- The follow up would depend on what the young person wants it to look like.
- Part of the conversation would have to be: this has happened, this is how we think we can avoid this happening again and we're really sorry it happened. What do you want it to look like? Should we avoid the topic or would you not want that attention brought to you?

## Scenario 3

A young person has been missing a lot of sessions. They have been making excuses about why, but on one occasion, they let you know they are struggling to get to sessions because they can't afford the travel and they are often very hungry when they do arrive.

- How do you approach this?
- Had a range of people from urban and rural locations in our group, were talking about the practicalities of moving sessions into a community venue more central to where the young people live
- Might help to link up with community food initiatives like food banks, one participant said their venue is close to a local bakery who give them surplus at the end of the day
- Financial assistance like topping up travel cards in urban places, walking buses for people in rural areas.
- Community initiatives like other parents stepping in to support with travel – implications it can have for families and additional financial strain.
- Safeguarding implications of independent travel
- Possibility that these symptoms might be signs of neglect, so the need to safeguarding signpost

#### **Scenario 4**

There is a young person in the group that tends to be very upbeat and happy when attending sessions. You have noticed over the past couple of weeks they have been a bit more withdrawn and less engaged in sessions. Despite it being the middle of summer, they have also started wearing long sleeve jumpers that you are not used to seeing them wear.

- How do you approach this?

#### **Feedback**

- Informal chat with the young person to check in about how they're doing. Talk to them about noticing a bit of a change.
- Would follow organisations procedure depending on what happens next i.e. logging and escalating a disclosure
- Not sure if we'd go to parents, it depends. This situation would require a bespoke approach

#### **Closing thoughts**

- Difference between safeguarding in a large organisation or smaller one – maybe we need a way for people to speak to organisations local to them who have more resource or experience. Having people whose doors you can knock on