



## Outcomes of Participation in Youth Theatre

As part of Centre Stage +20 Questionnaires, members and leaders were asked to review a list of outcomes related to participation in youth theatre and select any outcomes which were true of their own experience (members), or reflected what they had witnessed in their youth theatre (leaders). In general, members were more selective about what they recorded as outcomes of participation and leaders were more likely to choose a broad range of artistic, personal and social benefits of participation. These findings are detailed in Table 7.1.

**Table 7.1: Outcomes of Participation Listed by Members and Leaders**

Taking part in youth theatre has helped me to...	% of Youth Theatre Members	% of Youth Theatre Leaders
To improve my acting or performance skills	83.2%	82.9%
To be more creative	79.2%	94.7%
To improve my theatre and workshop skills	77.4%	82.9%
To mix with new people and make new friends	77.2%	90.8%
To be more confident and build my self-esteem	72.3%	97.4%
To take chances in drama and work outside my comfort zone	71.5%	93.4%
To work creatively with other young people to make new pieces of theatre	69.0%	88.2%
To be myself	67.6%	88.2%
To learn more about theatre and the arts	66.4%	84.2%
To feel better or happier	62.3%	82.9%
To escape stress and relax	61.7%	84.2%
To communicate better with people	61.6%	85.5%
To be more active and get involved	58.6%	73.7%
To work better in a team	58.6%	88.2%
To be more interested in other art forms like writing, dance, film, music or art	58.2%	72.4%
To be more able to express my feelings and ideas	55.5%	84.2%
To feel proud of what I've achieved with other young people	53.7%	82.9%
To voice my own opinions on theatre	53.5%	81.6%
To feel accepted and feel that I belong somewhere	52.7%	92.1%
To contribute my own opinions and help to make decisions	48.0%	84.2%
To take on responsibilities and commitments	46.5%	85.5%
To explore issues and stories that matter to me	41.6%	79.0%
To improve my theatre design or production skills	40.8%	71.1%
To achieve more at school or in other parts of my life	38.1%	65.8%
To progress to third-level theatre courses or professional theatre	25.7%	72.4%
To become a Young Leader and learn new facilitation/leadership skills	20.5%	73.7%

Figures are based on 596 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Member Questionnaire and 76 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Leader Questionnaire. Percentages are rounded to one decimal point.

- Artistic outcomes rated more highly with members in Centre Stage +20 Member Questionnaires than they did in Centre Stage +10. The 'Top 3' outcomes of participation listed by members were artistic in nature. Indeed, six out of the 'Top 10' outcomes listed by members were related to theatre and the arts. It is unclear whether this is due to an expanded choice of artistic outcomes in this edition of the research project, changes in practice and programming, or changes in the needs and interests of members. It is clear that members value the impact that youth theatre can have on their artistic and creative development.
- Some artistic outcomes were relevant to a specific cohort within the membership. For example: 41% of members felt they had improved theatre design or production skills; 26% felt that youth theatre was helping them to progress to third-level theatre courses or professional theatre; and 21% reported that youth theatre was helping them to become a Young Leader and develop new facilitation/leadership skills.
- The most common outcomes related to personal or social development are reflective of the results from Centre Stage +10 and Centre Stage. Members reported that key outcomes of participation were being able to mix with new people and make friends (77%) and being more confident and building self-esteem (72%). An increase in confidence and self-esteem was the most important outcome for over a tenth of members (11%). Youth theatre members and leaders are more likely to prioritise social and personal outcomes when asked what they value about youth theatre participation.
- The remaining outcomes related to personal and social development in the 'Top 10' reflected the increasingly important role that wellbeing and positive mental health play in youth theatre. With 68% of members feeling that youth theatre helped them to be themselves and 62% of members reporting that youth theatre helped them feel better or happier (in comparison with 47% of members in Centre Stage +10), it is clear that youth theatre's impact on well-being has grown in the past decade. 'Feeling better or happier' is now the most important outcome for 11% of members.
- Young people are now more likely to say that youth theatre helps them to escape stress and relax than they were a decade ago. This outcome was raised by a few young people in Member Workshops in 2009 but is now reported by 62% of respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Member Questionnaire.

Individual outcomes of participation are explored in Sections 7.2 and 7.3.

### Sample Learning Outcomes Reported by Individual Youth Theatre Members

It was common for members to choose a range of artistic, social and personal outcomes that reflected the broad range of potential learning outcomes a member may experience, as is described by this member from County Limerick Youth Theatre:

*"Youth theatre is a place where I'm finally comfortable to express myself and my love for the arts. It's a place where I can express my opinions freely, make amazing new friends, become more confident and experience new things. I've realised and rediscovered so many passions here. I joined at a dark period in my life and it's been a constant light. Youth theatre gives me space to grow, to learn, to live. I don't know what I'd do without it."*  
**County Limerick Youth Theatre Member**

However, young people take what they need from their experience of youth theatre and some young people value a more limited range of specific outcomes that often reflect on the interests, needs and situations of these individual young people. Some young people value the personal and social outcomes they experience while others may value the artistic outcomes to a greater extent. This is evident in the 'Top 5 Outcomes' selected by some members through the Centre Stage +20 Member Questionnaire.

**Sample Outcomes 1:** Male Youth Theatre Member from rural background, with four years of experience.

- 1 To be myself.
- 2 To feel accepted and feel like I belong somewhere.

- 3 To feel better or happier.
- 4 To be more able to express my feelings and ideas.
- 5 To work better in a team.

**Sample Outcomes 2:** Female, 14-year-old Youth Theatre Member from a town, with two years of experience.

- 1 To improve my acting or performance skills.
- 2 To learn more about theatre and the arts.
- 3 To improve my theatre design or production skills.
- 4 To work creatively with other young people to make new pieces of theatre.
- 5 To improve my theatre and workshop skills.

**Sample Outcomes 3:** Female, 17-year-old Youth Theatre Member from a town, with seven years of experience.

- 1 To improve my acting or performance skills.
- 2 To escape stress and relax.
- 3 To be more creative.
- 4 To feel accepted and feel that I belong somewhere.
- 5 To become a Young Leader and learn new facilitation/leadership skills.

#### Benefits of Participation in Youth Theatre

During Member Workshops, young people were asked to choose an image which, for them, represented something they learned or gained from taking part in youth theatre. Members chose a broad range of images based on their own individual concerns and experience of youth theatre that reflected a spectrum of artistic, personal and social outcomes. The accompanying statements that members offered indicate beneficial outcomes including: increased confidence; increased self-belief and agency; increased levels of friendship and teamwork; increased levels of trust and risk-taking; improved self-esteem and a sense of belonging; and higher levels of well-being.

**Table 7.2: What did Members Learn or Gain from Taking Part in Youth Theatre?**

Selected Image	% of Member Workshop Participants	Sample Statement
	12%	"In youth theatre you're always encouraged to try new things and even if you don't think you can do it the people there will always encourage you to try your best."
	8%	"I learned to include everyone and teamwork. Everyone can bring something to the group."
	7%	"I learned to take risks and trust others more."
	6%	"I feel included and valued in youth theatre. I have more friends and I feel like I belong. I can be myself without judgement."
	5%	"I've gained confidence from being in youth theatre."

	5%	"I learned how to be myself completely and not try to blend in with the crew. To just be me! And enjoy standing out."
	4%	"Happiness and friendship."
	4%	"I gained new friendships and met new people from participating in youth theatre."
	4%	"I have to accept myself for who I am and be unapologetic and proud of who I am."
	3%	"I gained personal growth through youth theatre. It helped me to move through and improve obstacles and issues in relation to my mental health and emotions."
	3%	"I have learned that my voice is valid and will be heard."
	3%	"I have gained more imagination in youth theatre because in drama I can express myself."
	3%	"Ever since I started youth theatre it has made me think more and more about going into acting as a professional job."
	3%	"There's a variation in colours in this image and for me this represents diversity. How we all share the same interest while remaining ourselves."

#### Conclusions

Centre Stage +20 research indicates a rich spectrum of artistic, creative, personal and social outcomes of participation in youth theatre. Further research is required to deepen the conversation and evidence the impact of youth theatre participation as described by members and leaders.

## 7.2 Artistic and Creative Outcomes

### Key Findings

Centre Stage +20 members and leaders reported the following outcomes of participation related to artistic and creative development:

- Improved acting and performance skills;
- Improved theatre and workshop skills;
- Enhanced levels of creativity;
- Increased creative confidence and risk-taking;
- Enhanced ability to work creatively as an ensemble to make theatre;
- Increased knowledge and experience of theatre and the arts;
- Increased interest in other art forms;
- Enhanced ability to express opinions about theatre;
- Improved theatre design or production skills;
- Increased ability to progress to third-level theatre courses or professional theatre;
- Increased opportunities to learn facilitation/leadership skills and become a Young Leader.

### Centre Stage Context

In Centre Stage +10, members and leaders reported that participation in youth theatre resulted in an increase in theatre skills, workshop skills and levels of creativity. Members also described an increased appreciation of theatre and the arts in general, and a section of the membership reported that youth theatre could provide a pathway for young people who wanted to work professionally in theatre.

In Centre Stage (1998), 75% of members reported developing skills in the arts, the majority of which were theatre skills such as acting, improvisation, and drama, singing/voice skills, movement/mime and dance. Centre Stage also showed that youth theatre was a catalyst for stimulating young people's engagement in other cultural activities, 78% of members reported becoming interested in something new as a result of joining youth theatre.

### Artistic and Creative Outcomes

#### Improved Acting, Theatre and Production Skills

- 83% of members and 83% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to improve acting or performance skills.
- This was prioritised in the 'Top 5' outcomes of 51% of members and 17% of leaders.
- 77% of members and 83% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to improve theatre and workshop skills.
- This was prioritised in the 'Top 5' outcomes of 39% of members and 15% of leaders.

Members and leaders believed that youth theatre contributed greatly to the development of a range of skills involved in acting, performance, theatre-making and workshop participation. Throughout the research, members and leaders have highlighted the importance of theatre skills such as improvisation, movement, voice, physical theatre, writing, directing and working with text. They have asserted the importance of ensemble theatre and collaborative theatre practices such as devising. They have recorded their experiments with street art performances; promenade productions and site-specific work; one-act festivals and cross-cultural theatre exchanges. Members and leaders have explored a continuum of theatre practice and developed theatre skills and competencies that are valued by members.

*"Youth theatre, to me, has been a place to improve and work on my acting/theatre skills."*  
Kildare Youth Theatre Member

*"Youth theatre is a chance to improve my acting and performance skills. To meet new people and to act in and devise plays and films."*  
Glengarriff Youth Theatre Member

*"Youth theatre is a form of art. It is a safe place for young performers to express themselves*

*and develop their performance skills without the pressure of an external environment. It pushes young performers and helps them discover a new way of performing. Youth theatre inspires its members in ways that nothing else can."*  
National Festival of Youth Theatres Participant

A section of the membership also felt that youth theatre helped them to develop their theatre design or production skills in terms of: stage, lighting, sound and costume design; stage management; technical theatre; and set or costume construction. The lower percentage of members who selected this outcome reflects the reduced segment of the sector which offers these types of experiences within their programming.

- 41% of members and 71% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to improve their theatre design or production skills.
- This was prioritised in the 'Top 5' outcomes of 11% of members.

#### Enhanced Levels of Creativity

- 79% of members and 95% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to be more creative.
- This was prioritised in the 'Top 5' outcomes of 45% of members and 28% of leaders.

Youth theatre members and leaders believed that youth theatre was an environment that fostered creativity within the ensemble and valued each young person's individual creativity. Members and leaders associated creativity with a strong sense of originality and individualism. All creative acts are also a form of self-expression and members aligned a growing confidence in their own identity with an increased enjoyment of creative self-expression. Centre Stage +20 research shows that youth theatre encourages young people to 'go beyond the obvious', to try out new ideas, new ways of thinking and problem-solving within their theatre practice that promotes creative thinking.

*"Youth theatre is a great place for me to express myself and my personality. I have become so confident in myself and creativity."*  
Mr. Sands Youth Theatre Member

*"Youth theatre is a place where I can go to be myself and be creative."*  
Dublin Youth Theatre Member

*"The chance to be more creative and have fun with loads of great people."*  
Activate Youth Theatre Member

*"Youth theatre develops young people's creative skills and thinking. They can see creative opportunities."*  
Waterford Youth Arts Leader

#### Increased Creative Confidence and Risk-Taking

- 71% of members and 93% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to take chances in drama and work outside their comfort zone.
- This was prioritised in the 'Top 5' outcomes of 28% of members and 31% of leaders.

Members describe youth theatre as a supportive space where they can express themselves, take creative risks and step outside their comfort zone without fear of being judged. Creative risk-taking is key to the range of improvised and devised work that takes place in youth theatre workshops. Members are encouraged to trust their instinct, trust their imaginations and play together to create their own work.

*"Youth theatre gets me out of my comfort zone and I try new things."*  
M.A.D. Youth Theatre Member

*"I'm more willing to take the risk to try something with less fear of making a flop of it, or an ass of myself. Even if I do, I'm still going to do it."*  
Participant, Dublin Members Workshop

*"I get to challenge myself and put myself out of my comfort zone, but I also have fun doing it."*  
Limerick Youth Theatre Member

*“I have learned to be fearless.”*

*Participant, Limerick Members Workshop*

#### **Enhanced Ability to Work Creatively as an Ensemble to Make Theatre**

- 69% of members and 88% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to work creatively together and make new pieces of theatre.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 28% of members and 17% of leaders.

The ensemble approach is a fundamental principle of youth theatre practice. Youth theatres work collaboratively as a ‘company’ and over time members learn to work together to establish trust, make creative decisions collaboratively, share ownership of the artistic work and take collective responsibility. Members learn, explore and create their own unique pieces of theatre within the context of this group experience. Leaders describe how experienced members become role models within the ensemble that support the development and inclusion of new members when they arrive.

Members develop the skills to work creatively together to imagine, develop and share their own pieces of theatre with the wider community.

*“It means to act with other teenagers to create an amazing piece of theatre. To improve my acting, to possibly prepare me for a career in professional acting.”*

*An Grianán Youth Theatre Member*

*“I have learned how to use my imagination to create a story.”*

*Participant, Limerick Members Workshop*

*“They develop theatre skills, learn what kind of stories they want to tell and why, and interrogate the world around them a little.”*

*Droichead Youth Theatre Leader*

*“An important outcome of participation in youth theatre is that every young person is engaged aesthetically and increases their ability to create, make and imagine.”*

*Kildare Youth Theatre Leader*

*“Youth theatre is learning to express yourself through other characters and turning your thoughts and stories into work to present. It’s exploring worlds you never thought of, and people you didn’t think you cared about.”*

*National Festival of Youth Theatres Participant*

#### **Increased Knowledge and Experience of Theatre and the Arts**

- 66% of members and 84% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to learn more about theatre and the arts.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 27% of members and 17% leaders.

Members and leaders described a growth in terms of young people’s understanding of, and appreciation of, the aesthetics of theatre. In particular, those members whose youth theatres offered a broad programme involving different types of scripted and devised productions, a variety of staging approaches, a range of theatre techniques and practices, and opportunities to engage with theatre and youth theatre in the broader sector, benefitted from an increased knowledge and experience of theatre.

*“I have gained more confidence and have learned new things and aspects of theatre.”*

*Participant, Limerick Members Workshop*

*“Members gain experience and appreciation of theatre as an artform.”*

*Activate Youth Theatre Leader*

*“Youth theatre gives me a chance to express my feelings in the form of art and to immerse myself in the culture of theatre and the arts.”*

*Act Out Youth Theatre Member*

#### **Increased Interest in Other Art Forms**

- 58% of members and 72% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to be more interested in other art forms like writing, dance, film, music or art.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 12% of members and 5% of leaders.

Young people who are involved in youth theatre are very active creators and consumers of other art forms (See Section 5.2.1). As a multi-disciplinary art-form, youth theatre can also introduce young people to other art forms, including visual art and design, music and sound design, filmmaking and writing. For example, of 605 Member Questionnaire respondents, 26% had experience of filmmaking through their youth theatre.

*“Youth theatre is what sparked my passion for art.”*

*Participant in Dublin Member Workshop*

*“It is about the future of the arts in Ireland – our work at ground level has a huge influence in the wider arts world.”*

*Waterford Youth Arts Leader*

#### **Enhanced Ability to Express Opinions about Theatre**

- 54% of members and 82% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to voice their own opinions on theatre.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 10% of members and 3% of leaders.

Participating in youth theatre and attending both professional theatre and youth theatre productions helps members to broaden their knowledge of theatre, and explore how and why it is made. Through regular practice in giving and receiving feedback and constructive criticism during workshops, members are more able to express their own opinions about theatre and respect the opposing views of others. With many youth theatres engaging in ‘Young Critics’ practice alongside a theatre trip, members are gaining greater confidence in discussing theatre and developing their critical voice.

*“Be confident in your opinions, perspective and taste.”*

*Participant, Young Critics Programme 2017*

*“I’ve learned more about how to express myself and my opinions on theatre.”*

*Participant, Young Critics Programme 2017*

*“Each play that we went to see was unique and experimental in its own way. Sure, there were some of the plays that I didn’t enjoy, but that doesn’t mean they weren’t worth watching, because every single one of them brought a creative idea to the table. And even when the plays weren’t too great for me, that was good, because opinions were divided amongst the group, allowing for great discussions to take place.”*

*Kildare Youth Theatre Member and TeeNEXTers Participant 2017 (See Section 4.3.5)*

#### **Improved Ability to Progress to Third-Level Theatre Courses or Professional Theatre**

- 26% of members and 72% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to progress to third-level theatre courses or professional theatre.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 9% of members and 6% of leaders.

For a segment of the membership, youth theatre is an important training ground that supports members’ aspirations to study theatre at third-level or to work professionally in the arts or theatre sectors. Of 582 respondents to the Member Questionnaire, 45% wanted to be a professional actor and 34% wanted to work professionally in theatre.

Youth theatre programmes and participation in the Youth Theatre Ireland national programme can offer progression routes for young people who want to specialise in particular theatre disciplines. For example, Youth Theatre Ireland’s ‘National Youth Theatre Programme’<sup>37</sup>, Dublin Youth Theatre’s ‘Writers Groups’ (See Section 4.3.3) or Backstage Youth Theatre’s youth-centred approach to designing,

<sup>37</sup> The National Youth Theatre (a Youth Theatre Ireland project) is an ensemble production created with a cast of young people from youth theatres across Ireland. The young people work with professional artistic and technical teams culminating in a production staged at the Abbey Theatre.

producing and staging its annual pantomime.

Progression to professional theatre or third-level theatre courses is not an explicit objective of youth theatre practice. Leaders tend to discretely support those young people who wish to pursue theatre beyond their youth theatre years, by helping with audition preparation, and giving advice or information.

*“Youth theatre allows me to work in theatre and gain the experience to study drama and acting at a third degree level as well as hopefully make a career.”*

*Glengarriff Youth Theatre Member*

*“A stepping stone to my acting career.”*

*Mostrim Youth Players Member*

*“Youth theatre means so much to me. I love acting and youth theatre has allowed me to explore who I am. I hope to become a professional actor and I think that youth theatre has helped me improve my skills which I am very grateful for.”*

*Rusty Frog Youth Theatre Member*

#### Increased Opportunities to Learn Facilitation/Leadership Skills and Become a Young Leader

- 20% of members and 74% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to become a Young Leader and learn new facilitation/leadership skills.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 2% of members.

A fifth of the respondents to the Member Questionnaire reported that participating in youth theatre had helped them to become a Young Leader and learn new facilitation/leadership skills. These young people were still categorised as members but had already begun to take on some leadership responsibilities appropriate to their age range and were beginning to identify as Young Leaders. Youth theatre membership provides an important training ground for Young Leaders in terms of learning about youth theatre ethos and practice, workshop facilitation and theatre skills, as well as leadership skills. Young Leaders are explored in Section 6.3.

#### Conclusion

Youth theatre members rate the artistic and creative outcomes of participation in youth theatre highly. Members and leaders describe a rich and diverse range of outcomes which are supporting young people to develop as theatre-makers and creative thinkers. The wide range of resources and programming capabilities within the sector means that not all members have the same opportunities to achieve the same level of artistic and creative outcomes. It is important that the sector, and the Youth Theatre Ireland national programme, works to address inequality of opportunity where it exists and to support all young people to reach their potential.

## 7.3 Social and Personal Outcomes

### Key Findings

Centre Stage +20 members and leaders reported the following outcomes of participation related to personal and social development:

- Increased opportunities and ability to mix with new people and make friends;
- Increased levels of confidence and self-esteem;
- Greater sense of self-identity and self-expression;
- Improved sense of wellbeing and happiness;
- Decreased anxiety and stress levels;
- Improved communication skills;
- Increased levels of activity and involvement;
- Improved teamworking skills;
- Increased ability to express feelings and ideas;
- Increased sense of pride in achievements with other young people;
- Improved sense of acceptance and belonging;
- Increased ability and opportunities to contribute opinions and help make decisions;
- Enhanced ability to take on responsibilities and commitments;
- Greater opportunities to explore issues and stories that matter;
- Enhanced levels of achievement at school and other areas of life.

### Centre Stage Context

Youth theatre members and leaders that participated in Centre Stage +10 described a rich combination of personal and social outcomes arising from participation in youth theatre. Youth theatre members reported a rise in confidence and self-esteem, an increased number of friendships and an increased ability to make friends as the key personal and social outcomes. Centre Stage (1998) reported that almost all youth theatre members experienced positive social benefits from their involvement with youth theatre. The Centre Stage report examined the social impact of participation within the framework of Francois Matarasso’s 1997 study *‘Use or Ornament – The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts’*<sup>38</sup> and found that the range of social benefits were remarkably similar, including: reduces isolation; increases self-confidence and sense of self-worth; has a positive impact on how people feel; helps build new skills; and can promote tolerance and intercultural communication.

### Social and Personal Outcomes

#### Increased Opportunities and Ability to Mix with New People and Make Friends

- 77% of members and 91% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to mix with new people and make new friends.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 31% of members and 35% of leaders.

Youth theatre members and leaders reported increased numbers of friends and an increased ability to make friends as a common outcome of participation in youth theatre. Members describe how taking part in workshops with each other, creating productions together and having shared interests really helped them to form lasting friendships. Some young people who felt excluded within school settings described how they had found their ‘tribe’ in youth theatre and were able to build key friendships. The positive experience of friendship within youth theatre also impacted on young people’s ability to make friends in other settings, with young people describing how the new skills and confidence they had gained helped them get to know new people.

*“Family - To see all your friends once a week and to have that emotional bond with one another.”*

*Bui Bolg Youth Theatre Member*

*“I come to be with friends and to relax. To have a good time.”*

*Droichead Youth Theatre Member*

*“It’s a way to connect with other young people who share similar interests to me.”*  
**Backstage Youth Theatre Member**

*“It’s a place where I can be around people who care about me and where I can be myself.”*  
**Waterford Youth Arts Member**

*“They find likeminded young people therefore breaking isolation. They can make new friends and some of these will be lifelong friendships.”*  
**Waterford Youth Arts Leader**

#### Increased Levels of Confidence and Self-Esteem

- 72% of members and 97% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to be more confident and build their self-esteem.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 37% of members and 58% of leaders, with 29% of leaders ranking it ‘No. 1’.

The development of confidence and self-esteem is one of the most commonly cited benefits of participation in youth theatre. Young people describe feeling more outgoing and having a new belief in their own opinions and abilities. This growth in confidence is partnered with a rise in self-esteem and a belief in their own value as an individual person within the youth theatre. Self-esteem is nurtured through the creation of a safe and supportive environment for all young people, but also through young people’s developing sense of competency and achievement in theatre.

*“Youth theatre allows me to be myself. I’ve really come out of my shell. I’ve gained so much confidence thanks to being on stage.”*  
**Griese Youth Theatre Member**

*“To me it is my safe haven where I can go and express myself without judgement. It has helped me deal with my anxiety and helped me by giving me the confidence to talk to people and get more involved and open with my family and even my friends.”*  
**Limerick Youth Theatre Member**

*“The most important outcome is the transformative rise in self-esteem and confidence that comes from a sense of belonging.”*  
**County Limerick Youth Theatre Leader**

#### Greater Sense of Self-Identity and Self-Expression

- 68% of members and 88% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to be themselves.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 27% of members and 46% of leaders, with 22% of leaders ranking it ‘No. 1’.

Youth theatre members describe youth theatre as a place where they can discover who they are and be themselves without fear of judgment from others. They report that youth theatre allows them to experiment, play and explore other identities through theatre while at the same time helping them to feel more comfortable about showing their own unique set of characteristics and interests to others. Members and leaders describe how youth theatre frees them from the value systems within schools and families, and gives them the space to re-invent themselves. Many members have a heightened sense of being ‘judged’ for who they are in school settings and describe feeling ‘safe’ to be themselves in youth theatre.

*“It means a place where I can let go, be myself without being judged.”*  
**Griese Youth Theatre Member**

*“I feel included and valued in youth theatre. I have more friends and I feel like I belong. I can be myself without judgement.”*  
**Participant, Dublin Members Workshop**

*“Somewhere I can be weird and others can be weird and its okay.”*  
**Griese Youth Theatre Member**

*“It gives you a space where you don’t have to hold yourself back or reserve anything. You don’t have to put on a ‘social mask’ and you can just be enveloped by the creativity and absurdity of drama and the arts.”*  
**Droichead Youth Theatre Member**

#### Improved Sense of Wellbeing and Happiness

- 62% of members and 83% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to feel better or happier.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 22% of members and 22% of leaders.

Members and leaders reported that participation in youth theatre brought about an increased sense of well-being and happiness. They described feelings of happiness arising from: the friendships that are developed in youth theatre; the enjoyment of participating in workshops and creating work together; the sense of belonging that members feel; the sense of being your ‘true self’ and doing something authentic; the satisfaction of being active and having purpose. Many young people described youth theatre as their ‘happy place’ or reflected that youth theatre was their ‘favourite day of the week.’

*“Youth theatre is a place where I can do things that make me happy with people who share the same interest.”*  
**M.A.D. Youth Theatre Member**

*“To me youth theatre is a place I can go and express myself. Every week I go and enjoy two hours of fun with friends I make/made in my youth theatre. It is a place of pure happiness to me.”*  
**Monaghan Youth Theatre Member**

#### Decreased Anxiety and Stress Levels

- 62% of members and 84% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to escape stress and relax.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 21% of members and 20% of leaders.

The importance of youth theatre as a place to escape the stresses of everyday life has grown over the past decade, with just over a fifth of members placing ‘to escape stress and relax’ in their ‘Top 5’ outcomes of participation. A section of the membership are dealing with varying levels of anxiety related to schoolwork and exams; socialising in schools; family life; and in some cases, more serious mental health issues. They describe youth theatre as an ‘escape’ or a ‘release’ from stress and pressure.

*“It means relief from stress in school and gives me an opportunity to increase my confidence.”*  
**County Limerick Youth Theatre Member**

*“Youth theatre means escaping a world of school, deadlines and other stresses to enjoy myself while also working around professionals to enhance my skills.”*  
**Monaghan Youth Theatre Member**

*“Youth theatre is a place where I feel relaxed and calm. It’s a place I go to recharge my batteries.”*  
**Activate Youth Theatre Member**

#### Improved Communication Skills

- 62% of members and 86% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to communicate better with people.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 14% of members and 15% of leaders.

Youth theatre members and leaders believe that participation in youth theatre can help to improve communication skills as well as confidence levels in the opinions and ideas that are being communicated. Youth theatre practice which explores non-verbal communication, feedback, and constructive criticism can develop an ability to read others, to listen, to think critically, to be articulate and to be open. Creating an environment which actively includes everyone’s ideas helps young people to value their own contributions.

*“It helps me escape the hell-hole that is the junior cert. It also has given me confidence and I have learned to communicate better.”*

*An Grianán Youth Theatre Member*

#### Increased Levels of Activity and Involvement

- 59% of members and 74% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to be more active and get involved.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 10% of members and 6% of leaders.

Members and leaders reported that youth theatre provided them with something positive to do at weekends or on weekday evenings. For some young people, there was a significant value in simply having something important to leave the house for. Other young people reflected on the sense of purpose youth theatre offered them and the ‘productive’ nature of their time with other members. Youth theatre was spoken of as a ‘community’ which was built by young people and helped members feel connected and involved within their own youth theatre team and occasionally within the wider local community.

*“A chance to mix with my friends and do something, and get out of the house.”*

*Glengarriff Youth Theatre Member*

*“Building a community and confidence.”*

*M.A.D. Youth Theatre Member*

*“The youth theatre is my home away from home where my problems are forgotten and the focus is on involving yourself into activities which I can’t get enough of.”*

*Monaghan Youth Theatre Member*

#### Improved Teamworking Skills

- 59% of members and 88% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to work better in a team.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 9% of members and 14% of leaders.

Members and leaders believe that youth theatre participation has a positive impact on teamworking skills. Youth theatre requires young people to work together as an ensemble to make and stage theatre productions, achieving shared goals and working together for the good of the group. Teamwork connects with many other social and personal outcomes as well, in terms of: listening to other members of the group and developing good communication skills; expressing your own opinions and taking onboard other people’s ideas; and sharing responsibility. Teamwork in youth theatre means valuing everyone’s unique skills and strengths.

*“It means being part of a team and creating a production that makes people happy.”*

*Mostrim Youth Players Member*

*“Youth theatre is somewhere I can be myself, learn to work as a team and make new friends.”*

*An Grianán Youth Theatre*

#### Increased Ability to Express Feelings and Ideas

- 56% of members and 84% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to express feelings and ideas.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 9% of members and 23% of leaders.

Closely linked with the growth of communication skills and the development of self-identity, members and leaders also believe that youth theatre helps young people to express their feelings and ideas. Youth theatre gives young people the confidence and space to articulate their views and the assurance that their opinions will be listened to and valued. Members appreciate youth theatre as a meaningful opportunity for self-expression: the expression of their personality, feelings and opinions through discussions and the creative process of making theatre.

*“It means a place where I can express my own thoughts, ideas, opinions and artistic capabilities, surrounded by like-minded individuals.”*

*Kildare Youth Theatre*

*“It has given me the power of a voice which I didn’t know I had before. I believe in change and in speaking about issues and I want to make people more aware of the world around us.”*

*PlayActing Youth Theatre Member*

*“Youth theatre has been a valuable medium to express myself and has helped me build confidence.”*

*Kilkenny Youth Theatre Member*

#### Increased Sense of Pride in Achievements with Other Young People

- 54% of members and 83% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to feel proud of what they have achieved with other young people.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 10% of members and 20% of leaders

Participation in youth theatre can help young people connect with their broader interests, feel motivated and help them develop a sense of purpose beyond themselves that links them to the wider community. This sense of purpose and a passion for theatre leads youth theatre members to work very hard together to imagine, make and share their theatre work. Members describe feeling a great sense of achievement and pride, particularly with respect to the productions and performances they stage.

*“Gets me out of the house. I see some friends and sometimes make something I’m proud of.”*

*Droichead Youth Theatre Member*

*“Youth theatre is a place where I can feel comfortable and safe. It is somewhere I can express myself and my opinions, I can create something I am really proud of and get to make some amazing friends for life.”*

*PlayActing Youth Theatre Member*

*“A chance to work with other people and stage a production we can be proud of.”*

*CIT CSM Youth Theatre Member*

#### Improved Sense of Acceptance and Belonging

- 53% of members and 92% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to feel accepted and feel that they belong somewhere.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 11% of members and 43% of leaders.

Just over half of respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Member Questionnaire indicated that youth theatre gave them a sense of acceptance and belonging, however this outcome was more prevalent when members described what they valued about youth theatre. Members reported how youth theatre helps them feel accepted, secure and strong within a non-judgemental environment. This supportive environment is key to enabling young people to feel that they can fit-in and it is promoted through youth theatre practice, the facilitation style of the leader as well as through the behaviour of members.

Youth theatre members’ need to discover and express their own unique personality is balanced by an equally pressing desire to fit in. Members often speak of feeling ‘different’ or ‘weird’ within a school setting and then feeling both excited and relieved to find a place where their difference is accepted and valued. Youth theatre members often describe youth theatre as their ‘family’ or as a ‘home’, indicating that this sense of belonging is not temporary in nature but viewed as a permanent fixture within their lives.

*“Youth Theatre is a place where I feel I belong. It is so accepting and is my new favourite place in the world. It has not only taught me about theatre and how to improve my skills but it has taught me to be myself, be confident, and not be afraid to voice my opinions.”*

*M.A.D. Youth Theatre Member*

*“Taught me that it’s ok to be different and to have different interests than other people in your friend group, and to try different things and put me out of my comfort zone.”*

*Participant, Cork Members Workshop*

*“I’m gay. When I told people they were really supportive and helped me come out to my parents.”*

*Participant, Limerick Members Workshop*

*“I learned that I belong somewhere and don’t have to change to have friends. I gained friends from youth theatre.”*

*Participant, Longford Members Workshop*

*“A place where people can be accepted always.”*

*Fracture Youth Theatre Member*

#### **Increased Ability and Opportunities to Contribute Opinions and Help Make Decisions**

- 48% of members and 84% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to contribute opinions and make decisions.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 5% of members and 18% of leaders.

Young people are ‘members’ of their youth theatre, and their opinions, interests and needs are at the heart of a youth theatre’s decision-making processes. Members were not likely to prioritise this outcome, but it is directly related to increased confidence levels and a more developed sense of agency and empowerment. In youth theatre, members can express their opinions, be listened to, see their ideas acted upon and create change. This cycle is active within the creative processes of workshops and rehearsals, as well as within the youth participation structures of youth theatres (See Section 2.3.5).

*“Youth theatre means that I can have a voice and be my own person.”*

*Griese Youth Theatre Member*

*“That they discover agency in their lives and that they can make decisions, make informed choices, question the world, work with others, celebrate their strengths and accept and mitigate their weaknesses, take personal responsibility for their actions and that they learn a little about theatre.”*

*Kilkenny Youth Theatre Leader*

#### **Enhanced Ability to Take on Responsibilities and Commitments**

- 42% of members and 86% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to take on responsibilities and commitments.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 5% of members and 12% of leaders.

Members report feeling empowered to take on extra responsibilities and commitments within youth theatre related to: theatre production tasks; roles within workshops; the activities of members’ forums or member representatives; or, the general day-to-day operations of the youth theatre. These additional duties typically have real deadlines and can impact on other members and leaders, giving young people a sense of increased authority and responsibility that they equate with being ‘treated like an adult’. Youth theatre provides a safety net for young people to build their capacity to act independently, to manage themselves and develop their sense of self-efficacy (a belief in their ability to accomplish a task or succeed in a specific situation).

*“It means getting out there and feeling allowed to express my thoughts and ideas and opinions without fear, be treated like an adult and take on responsibilities and commitments I previously wouldn’t have. Meeting people like me and making new friends.”*

*Droichead Youth Theatre Member*

*“It is a place where I can be myself and improve my abilities in the arts. I can take on more responsibility.”*

*Backstage Youth Theatre Member*

*“They should develop a range of skills for living independent, critical, and purposeful lives (such as how to use information well, how to make decisions, how to use failure, how to take risks, how to adopt responsibility for themselves, how not to become compliant and passive in all aspects of life, how to solve problems, how to work collaboratively, how to recognise meaning, etc.)”*

*Kildare Youth Theatre Leader*

#### **Greater Opportunities to Explore Issues and Stories that Matter**

- 42% of members and 79% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to explore issues and stories that matter.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 3% of members and 12% of leaders.

The creative process in a youth theatre starts from the particular mix of personalities, interests and needs within the membership. This results in programming which is uniquely relevant to the young people in membership of the youth theatre. Members in Centre Stage +20 youth theatres have been exploring and creating plays about issues they see impacting on lives around them such as bullying, climate change, gender equality, mental health, use of social media and homelessness. Theatre can amplify young people’s voices on subjects they care about and empower young people to make change.

*“Youth theatre gives us the opportunity to present our issue/topic in a way that people will pay attention to. Whether we present the issues and leave the audience with their own thoughts and questions, or we show them our question and answer – we will make them think and make them aware of what is important. Youth theatre allows us to utilise this power and make change.”*

*PlayActing Youth Theatre Member*

#### **Enhanced Levels of Achievement at School and Other Areas of Life**

- 38% of members and 66% of leaders felt that youth theatre helped young people to achieve more at school or in other parts of their lives.
- This was prioritised in the ‘Top 5’ outcomes of 6% of members and 3% of leaders.

Nearly four out of ten respondents to the Centre Stage Member Questionnaire felt that youth theatre helped them to achieve more at school or in other parts of their lives. Even though the majority of members only mentioned school in a negative context, members could see how the new skills, confidence and competencies they had developed would serve them in other settings.

*“It’s an important part of my life that helps me in other areas of my interests e.g., debating.”*

*Cabinteely Youth Theatre Member*

#### **Conclusions**

Youth theatre members and leaders are very passionate about the social and personal outcomes of participation in youth theatre and are more likely to prioritise these outcomes when asked what they value about youth theatre participation. It is important to support youth theatre members and leaders to discuss, evaluate and communicate these outcomes so they can advocate for their youth theatre as an effective support for the development and empowerment of young people.