



STRANGE TOWN'S TOURING COMPANY AND OUR HIGHLY VALUED IMPACT

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Summary: Without Strange Town's Touring Company visiting schools, our feedback shows that the immediate lives and futures of young people across the city would be at risk. They would lose access to powerful, engaging storytelling that informs, educates, and sparks meaningful discussion in a way that truly resonates. Our performances are uniquely relatable and impactful - cutting through in ways that traditional methods often cannot. Feedback from schools consistently highlights how vital and valued these opportunities are for high school pupils.

Background: Strange Town is an award-winning Edinburgh-based performing arts charity which has been supporting local young people for over 15 years. We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to realise their creative potential - whatever their background or experience.

Our Touring Company visit schools with high quality work that is daring, exciting and educational, tackling subjects such as consent, online bullying and knife-crime. **In an increasingly isolated and challenging world for young people, our transformative storytelling has never been more essential.** The powerful and brilliant **Adolescence** received so much well-earned praise and attention for raising awareness, starting the conversation and paving the way for much-needed changes which will positively impact all of society – and this is all **thanks to the power of engaging, high quality drama as a way of telling the story and engaging people in an emotional way.** Official figures show knife crimes in Edinburgh has increased every year for the past three years. Crimes committed in a public place with a knife rose by more than a quarter (29%) in the two years between 2022/23 to 2024/25. Records show 250 offences in the Capital in 2024/25 up from 203 in 2023/24 and 178 in 2022/23. With resources, we can tour our transformational play **BALISONG** – specially written for schools as part of the No Knives Better Lives Programme. The play carefully tells the stories about the impact, the dangers and the devastating consequences of knife-crime in the current time.

Our specially commissioned original plays **reach young people effectively, they challenge rather than lecture the young people of our city, aiming to provoke questions and discussion on complex issues rather than spout dire warnings about the dangers of life.**

The plays are designed to capture the attention of the young people by using emerging young actors they can relate to, contemporary scripts and creating a high-quality experience in their schools. Our powerful and relatable activities break down barriers, spark discussion and debate.

We cut through the noise, and we reach our young audiences in a very unique and powerful way. We can work and collaborate with funders and educational partners to agree the subjects covered and stories portrayed.

In response to this funding being in question, we asked some of the schools we reach to give us their thoughts. The feedback was immediate and powerful:

Clara Diog, Teacher at Drummond High School: **As a teacher, I am constantly looking at ways to close the attainment gap; a gap that is created by poverty. Exposure to high-quality theatre opens doors to cultural experiences that some students might never otherwise access.** It deepens their understanding of storytelling, broadens perspectives, and inspires creativity in ways that pure imagination cannot do alone. Seeing professionals at work—witnessing their dedication, craft, and passion—helps students understand that theatre is not just



entertainment, but **an art form that requires discipline, collaboration, and imagination.** Additionally, these **performances spark engagement across the curriculum.** It is only in the Higher and Advanced Higher curriculums that students must attend live professional theatre in order to complete the course. It allows for **meaningful discussion and reflection on themes that are current to the society they live in.** It provides students with **role models** in the industry, showing them that careers in the performing arts are viable and valuable. By bringing professional theatre into our school at no cost, **we remove barriers and ensure all students—regardless of background—have access to enriching cultural experiences.** This investment in young minds **nurtures confidence, communication skills, and a lifelong appreciation for the arts.** Theatre is a valuable educational tool. When made accessible to students, **it encourages critical thinking, creativity, and personal growth which has a lasting impact.** We are deeply appreciative of the artists involved in Strange Town who make this possible, knowing that the **impact of their work extends far beyond the performance itself.”**

Head of Drama, Craigmount High School: “Having Strange Town come to us **removes barriers** to enable our young people to access high quality professional theatre in a place they are familiar with and comfortable in. Seeing a performance as part of the school day rather than an optional extra in the evening in the city centre suggests **theatre is valued in schools and is for everyone to enjoy.** Strange Town enables our young people to experience live theatre that is **relevant and necessary, as part of their education.**

Most of the students who are fortunate enough to have been to the theatre, have only experienced theatre to entertain eg a pantomime or a musical. Exposing them to Strange Town's work allows them to see how theatre can be used to put across message, explore a theme or issue, or tell a story from a different angle. The post-show discussions with the (often young adult) actors, **inspire the next generation** to pursue the creative industries after school.

As a drama teacher, **I see firsthand the transformative power of live professional theatre in shaping young minds.** Having free professional theatre brought into our school is not just a rare privilege—it's an essential opportunity that enriches learning far beyond the classroom, particularly for our senior phase curriculums; N4/5, NPA Acting & Performance, Higher and Advanced Higher.

Thanks to previous funding: Across the last three years we have, thanks to this funding, taken three important, specially commissioned plays for young people to secondary schools throughout the city of Edinburgh and beyond. **We have completed five tours, performed 62 times, held post show discussions with pupils and teachers in approx. 40 schools – reaching a collective audience of over 6,000 individuals across 14 EH postcodes.**

We rely on our fundraising to deliver our high-quality, transformative support which effectively reaches, educates and informs young people. **We are highly-valued by teachers and pupils alike and our work delivers a significantly positive contribution to the community overall.** We tackle subjects, which are incredibly important to their lives. For example, our plays cover knife crime and consent and through our live performances, **we engage often very hard to reach young people in ways that books, reports, documents and teacher-led conversation**



cannot – and we have never lived in a time when powerful engaging storytelling has been needed more.

Pupil, Drummond High School “If we didn’t get the opportunity to watch professional theatre in school for free, **there would be so many people myself included that would never in their school careers be able to access theatre**. With Strange Town coming into school it is hugely inspirational for many young people that they can make it in the theatre world and that there are **opportunities for them to thrive.**”

For many young people, this is the first time they experience a theatrical production, and we open their eyes to the world of performing arts as well as initiating important conversations which are often taken into classrooms to further discuss.

Head of Drama, Queensferry High School: “Without Strange Town, some of our **young people will never get the chance to see live theatre**, making their visits an **especially meaningful experience**. Their original performances not only entertain and engage learners but **inspire students to think critically, express themselves and form opinions due to the incorporation of themes relevant to young audiences**. **Strange Town encourages discussions around important social and historical issues, enhancing students' empathy and cultural awareness**. Additionally, the interactive and welcoming nature of their after-show question and answer sessions **promotes collaboration** and a chance for learners to ask questions to those in the industry.”

Our original, powerful writing tackles subjects of importance to young people’s lives

- HER by Jennifer Adam –a play about the damaging effects of gender inequality, the truth about consent and asks, how can you be the change you want to see in the world, when you feel like the world is fighting against you?
- AND ... AND ... AND by Isla Cowan – Cassie and Claire have been best friends all their life. Now, in their final term of high school, the world weighs heavy on their shoulders: will the stresses of the future finally push their friendship to its limits? Exploring the double-edged power of social media and collective action, this play asks, how do we come together when we feel so much like falling apart?
- STORM LANTERN by Duncan Kidd – the story of Sophie Scholl and the White Rose Movement in 1942 Nazi Germany. A history lesson and a warning – how far would you be willing to go to stand up for something you believed in?

Our highly-professional work regularly receive critical acclaim: STORM LANTERN was nominated for a 2023 CATS (Critics Award for Theatre in Scotland) Award for best play for children and young people and the scripts for STORM LANTERN and HER have been published by Salamander Street Publishers with the script for AND...AND...AND set to be published in 2026.

Further academic evidence

- A recent systematic review ([Joronen et al., 2008](#)) showed that **school-based drama programs succeeded in increasing knowledge and positive attitudes** related to health behaviour, such as healthy eating ([Perry et al., 2002](#)) and sexual health ([Harvey et al., 2000](#)).

- **Positive effects of drama programs on social skills have been reported** ([Wright, 2006](#); [Wright et al., 2006](#)) and positive experiences in social health have been reported; these include increased self-knowledge, teamwork skills, empathy and empowerment ([Toivanen, 2002](#); [Häkämies, 2007](#)) and, school-based drama process **helps emotional expression and emotional regulation** of students. ([Moneta and Rousseau, 2008](#))
- By entering a fictional world created in the drama, the students and teachers can move on safely into it. In this drama-learning process, the student creates new relationships of meaning through transformative process. The student and teacher **gain new perspectives about themselves, each other, and on reality** [([Østern, 2003](#)), p. 32]. The fictional world provides opportunity for independent thinking, cooperation, for a **healthy release of emotion and to build social awareness** ([McCaslin, 2000](#)).
- Evidence from the World Health Organisation¹ and wider policy² and academia³ has repeatedly highlighted the **positive contribution that engagement in the creative arts can have on mental health and wellbeing**. Not only can creative activities be used as a tool for distraction, contemplation and self-esteem development⁴, but when conducted in a group, they are *“particularly effective at fostering cooperation, self-concept and a sense of social inclusion for children, adults, families and communities and across different cultures”*⁵.

Yet despite all the evidence, Research shows most secondary school drama teachers believe that the pandemic harmed drama education; 84% of teachers responding to National Drama’s Covid Impact Study said **the pandemic had a “significant impact” on drama education**. At a time when schools are struggling, the provision of drama and the arts has in general dropped as a priority. Scotland’s average culture spend is amongst the lowest in Europe, with continual funding cuts **just over 0.5% of all investment goes into the arts**.

Additionally we create employment for local creatives: We have created employment for 3 playwrights, 10 actors – 8 early stage/first professional job, 3 first time assistant directors, 8 stage managers, 2 sound designers, set & costume designer, lighting designer and a video designer – providing early-stage creatives with exceptional work experience designed to help them take the next positive step in their careers.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our future funding in person.

¹ <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/9789289054553>

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/929773/DCMS_report_April_2020_finalx_1_.pdf

³ https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/UCL_Role_of_the_Arts_during_COVID_13012022_0.pdf

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2019/get-creative-research>

⁵ <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/9789289054553>