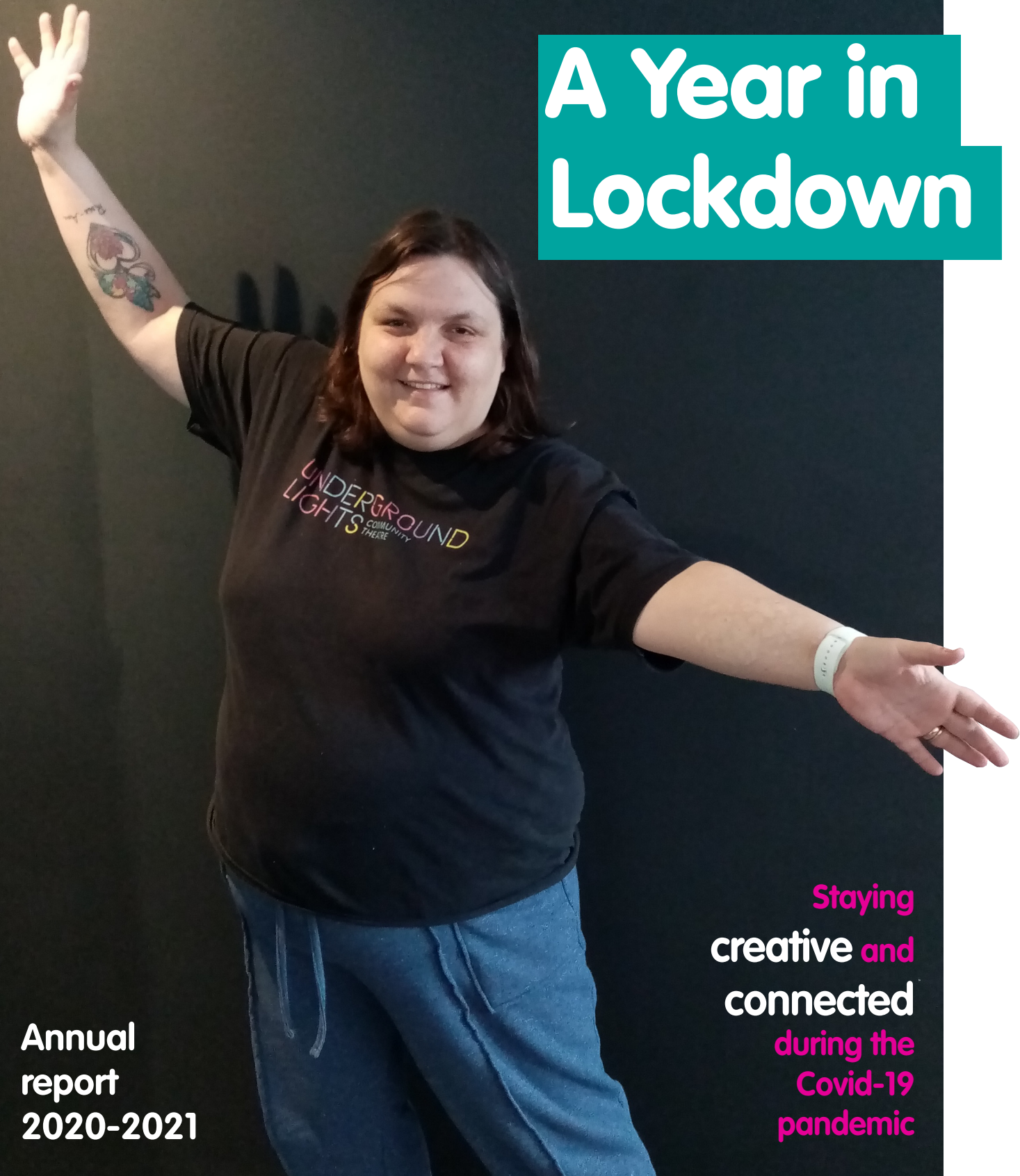


UNDERGROUND LIGHTS COMMUNITY THEATRE

A Year in Lockdown

Annual
report
2020-2021

Staying
creative and
connected
during the
Covid-19
pandemic



Underground Lights is a Belgrade Springboard Company, running workshops in association with the Belgrade Theatre Click Spring Programme. We are run by and for adults experiencing social disadvantage, homelessness and/or mental health issues in Coventry, Warwickshire and the surrounding area.

OUR TEAM

STAFF

Emma Ormerod (Artistic Director/ CEO)

Beth Fiducia-Brookes (Lead Drama Facilitator)

Wes Finch (Projects & Activities Assistant, February 2020-December 2020, Sessional Facilitator from January 2021)

Jessie Dutton (Projects & Activities Assistant from January 2021)

Frankie Robson (Sessional Facilitator from January 2021)

TRUSTEES

Jonathan Chilvers (Chair)

Emma Marks

Tracy Villiers

Mandip Seehra

Colin Tysall

VOLUNTEERS

Chris Campbell (IT, marketing and website)

Tracy Villiers (drama group)

Paul Okey (marketing)

Frankie Robson (fundraising, September 2020-December 2020)

Becky Eccleston (treasurer)

Malcolm Cave (drama group)

Debbie Bridgeman (online Creative Café)

Underground Lights
c/o Belgrade Theatre
Belgrade Square
Corporation Street
Coventry
CV1 1GS

Email: info@undergroundlights.org

Our objectives

- To offer regular, structured drama workshops in a relaxed and friendly environment for a diverse range of people.
- To provide opportunities for performance.
- To run outreach work where people new to performing arts can drop in, take part in different activities and share their creative work in a safe space.
- To provide mentoring and training for our members, enabling them to support and lead groups, support other participants, and actively take part in the running of the organisation.



Our Ethos: a member-led approach

Our lived experiences shape us and make us who we are today, but they don't need to limit us. Everyone at Underground Lights is a creative individual in their own right and has a great deal to contribute – we have the assets to understand ourselves and help each other as members of a group with a shared goal. As members of the Underground Lights collective, whether our role in the team is in a creative group, as a trustee, a staff member, or a volunteer, we all have an equally important role to play. We strive for genuine co-creation in all aspects of our work and seek to be an organisation where power is shared, decisions are taken together, and we are actively inclusive.



As we moved into our second year of activity as an organisation we were faced with many new challenges.

Lockdowns, social distancing and wearing masks are just some of the things that we would never have imagined being part of our daily lives at the start of 2020.

However, we continued to stay true to our ethos and aims as an organisation and the fantastic members of the Underground Lights team have demonstrated again and again this year that when faced with challenges and restrictions, we can work together, support each other, and become even more creative! At the start of the first lockdown,



Hayley, one of our volunteers, suggested putting together creative packs for people who couldn't afford them. This idea led to Underground Lights working in partnership with City of Culture, Crisis, Grapevine, Arty Folks and the Belgrade Theatre to deliver hundreds of packs to people across Coventry. We have also had the tremendous privilege of working with Arts and Homelessness International (AHI). Beth (our lead drama facilitator) and Hayley came up with the idea of sending blank postcards to people so they could decorate them with something that made them smile. With the support of AHI the postcards were sent out to their partner organisations and the project has now travelled across the world! It has been wonderful to see Beth and Hayley's idea grow

and develop in such an exciting way. We are planning for the postcards to be displayed during the Arts and Homelessness Festival in October 2021.

Thank you to everyone who has supported Underground Lights over the past year; our funders and supporters, our trustees and wonderful volunteers. I also feel incredibly grateful to work with such talented staff team. Beth, Wes, Jessie and Frankie should be extremely proud of everything they have done over the past year to continue to run activities and support members, sometimes in very challenging circumstances.

Finally, I would also like to thank the Belgrade Theatre and their staff team. We love being one of their Springboard

Companies and, as we move towards an exciting array of projects over the coming City of Culture year, we are delighted that they continue to be by our side on this journey as we grow and develop as an organisation.

Emma
Ormerod

Artistic
Director/
CEO



Welcome



How does a community theatre company do theatre without a theatre? How do you do drama when you can't meet in person to move, interact, communicate?

This is of course the challenge that Underground Lights faced when the pandemic hit in March 2020.

Our brilliant members and staff team rose to the challenge with customary commitment, skill and humour and a lot of hard work. Helping members overcome the digital divide and isolation through 1-1 support and creative art packs grew into online sessions and then performances of poetry, music and even collaborative pieces. We also enjoyed carefully meeting in person between lockdowns. A massive thank you also to

our funders for their flexibility and additional help which allowed us to develop new initiatives quickly and professionally.

As the months ticked by and zoom and uncertainty fatigue set in it wasn't always easy, but the moments of joy and connection we all gave each other have kept us going. Even through the pandemic it's been fantastic to see members and staff grow in character and confidence

and step into leadership roles.

We are now in a strong position to look forward to the excitement and revelry of being an arts organisation based in the middle of the City of Culture.

Enjoy the stories and pictures in these pages as we continue to see lives transformed through theatre.

Jonathan Chilvers
Chair of Trustees

OUR GOVERNANCE

The trustees are responsible for the governance and strategy of Underground Lights. The trustees bring a mix of skills and experience. Our commitment to being a member-led organisation means that it is important to recruit individuals to our Board who have experience of mental health

issues and/or homelessness. Of the five people serving on our board, three have lived experience of either mental health issues or homelessness.

The Board aims to meet at least four times per year and delegates day to day responsibility for the running of Underground Lights to the staff team. Following an

application and interview process, new trustees are appointed by the Board at one of their meetings.

As a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) our governing document is our Constitution (foundation model, where the voting members of the organisation are the Board of Trustees).

Our work this year



Who could have predicted what happened to us, suddenly plunged from creative writing, rehearsing and all the other diverse things that Underground Lights drama groups and the Creative Café set out to do. The feeling of being part of a group which made me feel almost like it was like a bereavement. But as it turned out, it was not an end, but A New Beginning...

Zoom groups, Facebook groups, and all the other social media things I'd tried hard to avoid, has made, to my mind at least, a stronger and more tightly knit group. Being creative, sharing art and writing poems and monologues virtually now means that I can't wait to see what happens next.

The 'creative packs' that grew from members to keep all of us motivated

to work our way through lockdown inspired many to become more creative, doing things we had never tried before. The results were amazing, I even amazed myself!



All of this creativity opened new ideas and scenarios, making masks and performing on the silent screen, our pictures and words just flew in from who knows where! The inspired idea of performing a 'shadow puppet' theatre show based on Aesop's fables was such a wonderful project to undertake, if a little stressful at times, but it all came good in the end with many of us surprised when it was received much better than I think any of us thought.

Apart from the normal Underground Lights workshops and group I was asked if I would like to be a panelist, as part of an online performance and discussion by Cardboard Citizens – a London-based theatre company. The performance highlighted the stories of people affected by the Vagrancy Act in the West Midlands and its impact on homelessness. It was good to work with another group that reflected the thoughts of many of us and it was a lively debate that made a lot of people think

So finally, lockdown wasn't so bad. It was another way to get our ideas across in ways we had never considered.

Long may we be inspired to push ourselves into things we didn't know we could do!

Rob

Spring and Summer 2020

Creative groups

- Our spring performance was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a team we responded rapidly by changing our model of working. We set up three zoom groups and ran 13 weeks of creative activity from the start of April to July. We were able to support approximately 15 of our members in this way (and some members joined the groups via loudspeaker over the phone).
- We also began 1:1 work with members, calling those who did not have internet access each week and providing extra staff support via WhatsApp for members with additional needs. Our bid to Heart of England for £1,200 emergency funding was successful which enabled us to increase staff time to support members.
- We set up a 'Stay Creative and Connected' Facebook group for members to share their work.

• Continued on next page

In Facebook I have been commenting on Underground Lights members' posts. I want them to know that I care about the work they are doing and I enjoy seeing it so much! I have got to know my friends at Underground Lights even better in these past few weeks through seeing their fantastic work and by messaging them.

My communication skills have got better because my confidence has grown. I think by getting so involved online, I've become more outgoing. I also think – dare I say it – that I have slowly been learning about some technical skills such as going on Zoom and Facebook. I've never done these things before. I'm still learning but I'm sure I'll get there in the end!"

Debbie

Our work this year

How did you feel during the first lockdown?

Emma: I felt down and I missed doing drama, because I love drama. I was missing out on seeing friends and it makes you feel lonely. I couldn't get online because data goes quickly each month and I haven't got a computer or laptop, only my phone.

How did you feel when you found out that our Wednesday morning support group could meet in person at the Belgrade?

E: When I found out we could meet up again I was over the moon, I was so happy. I thought "brilliant - we've got drama!" I was looking forward to seeing everyone again, all my friends and seeing the staff as well. I was so happy!

What did you enjoy about making our Commedia dell'arte film?

E: I enjoyed playing the role of Chantelle in the Commedia dell'arte film.
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Spring and Summer 2020 continued

Thirty-one members and trustees joined this group and this was a supportive place where members have shared their creative work and other activities of interest to them. Several members started watching more online theatre (eg. National Theatre productions).

- At the start of June we also started running weekly 'catch up chatter' sessions for members on a Wednesday afternoon. These groups were well attended, with between 7 and 14 people joining us for sessions.
- We held a summer term online sharing to a small invited audience in July and this was well received.

Other activities and achievements

- Beth (our Lead Drama Facilitator) organised a Q&A with the theatre company Clown Funeral in May which was well attended, with 10 members logging in.
- Naomi Rogers (a former ballet student and now a trainee arts psychotherapist) ran two movement workshops for us via zoom in June.
- Two of our members were accepted onto the City of Culture leadership programme.
- Beth and Wes (Projects and Activities Assistant) recorded a 'City Warm Ups' video for the Belgrade Theatre.
- Julianne, one of our members, also created dance videos for our Facebook group, one of which was also shared as part of the 'City Warm Ups' scheme.



Creative Packs and 'Send a Smile' Postcards project

Hayley

I'd always wanted to have a go at drama but didn't have a clue where to start. So, when I heard about Underground Lights I jumped straight in and have never looked back.

There's more to Underground Lights than drama. We have opportunities to explore performance, writing, music, dance, poetry, to name a few. As a creative, having a space to share ideas and meet like-minded people has improved my confidence no end. I'm now pleased to be a drama group volunteer and am working towards my Level 3 Award in Education and Training.

Our work this year

Autumn 2020

Creative groups

- For the first half of term (September and October) we ran three socially distanced support groups at the Belgrade with restricted numbers.
 - However, November saw us with the challenge of working through the second lockdown. On this occasion we were able to continue working in person with eight members who didn't have internet access or who couldn't connect to Zoom for different reasons. Members who were able to connect online worked via Zoom with the staff team.
 - We ended our term with our Lockdown Lessons online sharing event, which also enabled members who weren't online to participate via Zoom in the Patrick Suite at the Belgrade Theatre. Twenty-six audience members attended this event.
- 2020 was an extremely challenging year, but by focusing on supporting our regular group of 28 members we found ways to enable everyone to stay creative and connected.

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Emma: I thought she was amazing – a proper film star! I enjoyed making the mask for her and learning new things. I made sure her mask was all glittery and like a princess, and she had a feather as well.

At our online performance I really enjoyed seeing myself. I know we couldn't have an audience with us in the room because of Covid, but it was amazing!

I watched it on my phone as well and I was so happy to see myself on stage.

We've got to see different talents by members, whether it be colouring, paintings, drawings, and needle crafts. Thank you for supplying the materials needed to while away the time instead of watching TV to only hear about what this terrible virus is causing to our planet [...] Friday is the highlight of my week where I can go onto zoom and see my drama friends and even do activities with them which has been good for my wellbeing. If I didn't have this help I don't know what I'd do.

Susan

As a response to lockdown, I came up with the idea of creative packs.

It struck me that not everybody has materials at home to create art. So I suggested making creative packs to send out to members, with a programme of activities and the materials required to take part in the them. The idea was a hit.

We were able to deliver 400 of the first packs, containing art materials and activities, to vulnerable members of our communities. The packs helped to keep isolated people feeling connected during lockdown. A second phase of the packs, focusing more on a theatrical aspect, contained materials and instructions to make a smile mask and recipients were invited to join my 'Smile Tribe'. The thought behind this was that thinking



about smiling would lift people's spirits. Beth and I also developed the idea of sending out blank postcards for people to decorate with something that made them smile. Thanks to Arts and Homelessness International, the project has now travelled to homeless communities in the USA, Brazil, South Africa, India, Japan and Australia. That's nearly every continent on the planet!

Everybody has been doing incredible work across the country to support the vulnerable in our society over the past year. I'm pleased that we've been able to do something for our community and I hope the packs helped people to feel connected. I have a huge amount of thanks and gratitude to everyone who made this project possible.



Our work this year

How did you feel during the second lockdown?

Nikola: In the second lockdown we went from meeting in person to performing online. Online performance was a bit scary at first, but then I thought to myself "I can do this!" and I did it. I really enjoyed that project because I was with Rob and he's a fantastic actor. It was great working with him because he's very committed and we were both there every week. If it wasn't for that workshop and performance I would have been very isolated. I've always been alright on Zoom, but I know my friend has struggled and he was very isolated. So I think I was quite privileged.

I really enjoyed the Creative Cafés online as well. I really liked the poetry one, where we all wrote a poem and the one where we wrote a song with Wes and he performed it. And the shadow puppets. I really enjoyed that, although it was challenging because I had to make the shadow puppets in time for the performance – oh my goodness! The box kept falling down and the light wasn't quite right – but in the end it looked amazing!

Poem by Nikola

Life's like a butterfly
So fragile so am I
A wind flap from a butterfly
Can cause a storm and people die
Life is precious, life moves on
It's there and then it's gone.

Shadow puppets

Beth

We had hoped to meet in person for the spring term but moved back online and to remote activities in line with government restrictions and to help keep our members safe. As always we wanted to help keep our members connected and creative during this time, so decided to send out our third activity pack.

Hayley (who initiated the original creative packs in lockdown one), suggested we explore Shadow Puppets this term. We thought this was a great idea and really different to our previous projects (devising theatre, Commedia dell'arte, pantomime and improvisation), and it's been something members have enjoyed exploring.



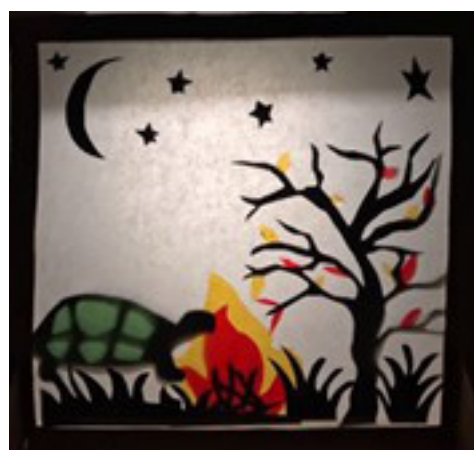
Linking the creative packs to the theme for the term has continued to enable our members to lead the process on what they want to create as they have the resources they need. Members who were unable to access Zoom, in addition to these creative packs, have also been posted a disposable camera and challenged to take creative photos which we hope to use as part of an exhibition in the future.

During our drama workshops members shared ideas and discussed themes they thought would work well, and at the suggestion of our Project



and Activities Assistant Jessie, we have taken inspiration from Aesop's Fables. Members chose stories and fine-tuned the message they wanted to convey for modern audience. They decided to keep the animal characters and created the puppets. Together over zoom we made trees and other shadow puppets which we then used to tell these stories. The shadow puppet stories were then recorded over zoom and on member's phones and edited together, along with the audio and music to make a short video by each group.

It has been really exciting to see the collaborative way in which members have led this process; from coming up with the initial idea, to what was needed in the activity packs, to which shadow puppets each group decided they would make. Our members amaze me with their creativity, enthusiasm and supportiveness.



Our work this year

What do I like about Underground Lights? I like coming to Underground Lights to meet friends and do drama. I love drama, being creative and just being myself. I'm more confident in myself, because when I first came I was shy, nervous... a bit unsure, but I feel more confident in myself now – being open to other people in the group and leading people in activities.

KATE

Autumn 2020 continued

Other activities and achievements

- During the autumn term we were involved in a range of online activities:
 - o Monthly online Open Mic event run jointly with Crisis.
 - o Ascension Dance – In Touch project (run by Ascension Dance for Crisis and UL members, with staff support from Crisis and UL).
 - o Poetry group – (delivered by Frankie and Ben) for UL and Crisis members, leading to the performance 'Community to me is...' in October.
- Staff team attended meetings of Coventry's new Arts and Homelessness Forum.
- We supported two Occupational Therapy students from Coventry University who attended our groups as part of their 3rd year placement at the Belgrade Theatre.
- Jessie Dutton was appointed as our new Projects & Activities Assistant.
- Yvonne Cullen, a PhD student at the University of Kent, began a longitudinal study with our members on their experiences of agency within Underground Lights.

A Stitch in Time project

Frankie

I have had so much fun since joining Underground Lights Community Theatre! I started my journey with UL as a fundraising volunteer and I soon got stuck in with meeting the members and immersing myself into the fantastic atmosphere you can find in every workshop with the company and their members. I had a real great time spreading awareness about what fantastic work happens at UL and this soon turned into a really great project idea! We immersed the Belgrade Theatre in art work after a collaboration with Needlecraft for Wellbeing, a Coventry based support group. 'A Stitch in Time' allowed our brilliant and creative members to write poetry or stitch/ knit something which would dress the windows of the theatre. Our theme was to write poetry



about the lockdown and our members created beautiful poems and inspirational work that was enjoyed by everyone in Cov who walked past the theatre.

I soon developed my facilitation skills in this environment and became a Sessional Facilitator. As always at UL, I cannot wait to see what more we create... watch this space!

Our work this year

Spring 2021

Creative Groups

- Due to the third national lockdown we returned to running online groups and making 1:1 calls. Groups developed shadow puppet creative packs and over 60 packs were sent to Underground Lights and Crisis members, and residents at the Days Hotel.
- We received funding from National Survivor User Network (NSUN) for a BSL interpreter for our online shadow puppet performance and 35 audience members joined us for this event.
- In addition to our online drama groups, we also ran online Creative Café sessions during the spring term.



Underground Lights is really, really good for being able to express ourselves, it's really good for everyone to be able to just do our best ... and the most important thing is that everyone supports each other and is enthusiastic and I don't think I've ever experienced it before in my life.



Other activities and achievements

- We co-hosted the Arts and Homelessness Forum for three months, with Tracy, one of our trustees, co-chairing the meetings.
- Several members joined the steering group for 'Home', the Arts and Homelessness Festival in October 2021.
- Our members joined with the Needlecraft for Wellbeing group at the Belgrade Theatre to create the Stitch in Time project which was displayed at the theatre in February 2021.
- One of our members, Rob, participated as a panellist in Cardboard Citizens' Vagrancy Act Midlands event.
- Our sessional facilitators also began to work on our outreach project and despite the many challenges of lockdown, ran two online workshops to create an audio track for the final piece (to be launched in July 2021).
- We developed a Staff Handbook and ran two staff training sessions.
- 'A Stitch in Time', a collaborative project with Needle Craft for Wellbeing, saw four of our members' poetry and crafted items come together with the yarners' work to make a window display at the Belgrade Theatre. Frankie, who led the project for Underground Lights, spoke about the project on BBC Warwick and Coventry in February.
- Rob, one of our members, also took part in Cardboard Citizens' online West Midland specific performance 'The Vagrancy Act' and panel discussion. Several members also joined to support and engaged in the discussion.
- Tudor Trust offered a wellbeing grant of £2,000 to their grantees for trustees, staff and volunteers. Through this fund Underground Lights team members participated in a variety of activities (baking, photography, drumming, art etc.) to support their individual wellbeing.
- We were successful in our application for legal pro bono work (via The Fore Foundation) and the global law firm Shearman and Stirling began a policy and legal audit of the charity.

Audience feedback

"The storytelling is mesmerizing"

"There is such a lovely dream like quality to some of these tales – magical".

"This has been so incredible. I've so, so enjoyed this".

Our finances



The Covid-19 pandemic meant that during this period there were unexpected demands with regard to our capacity and resources as an organisation. Our emergency fundraising efforts were successful and we received additional grants from Heart of England and Groundwork - Tesco Bags of Help scheme. City of Culture and Arts and Homelessness International also supported the Creative Packs and Postcards Project work.

At a board meeting in January 2021, trustees approved a payment of £150 for freelance photography work by Mandip Seehra that he had completed prior to applying for and becoming a trustee in the financial year 2020/21. He did not invoice because of the second part of the work he was due to do which did not happen because of the pandemic. He then became a trustee. The board

agreed that this was permissible in our constitution and took steps to ensure that the decision was fair (Mandip did not attend this part of the board meeting and was not involved in the decision).



In preparing the financial statements the trustees believe that Underground Lights is able to continue as a going concern until April 2022. However, continuing in operational existence over the coming year will deplete our reserves and we will not be able to continue to operate beyond this date. Fundraising both for the medium and longer term will continue to be a priority for the coming year.

Income

Donations	£1,611
Coventry City of Culture Trust	£713
Heart of England	£2,700
Tudor Trust	£27,000
Other income	£5,239
Total income	£37,263

Expenditure

Staffing costs	£29,573
Volunteers (travel expenses and wellbeing fund)	£4,592
Operational/Activity	£1,754
Publicity and marketing	£393
Other admin costs	£2,507
Total expenditure	£35,006

■ Figures from 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021

THEATRE HAS THE POWER TO CHANGE LIVES

The Underground Lights Board of Trustees submits its statutory Report and Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2021.

The Trustees' Report and Financial Statements have been prepared in accordance with the Companies Act 2006, and Charities Act 2016 and comply with UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice (GAAP). They also comply with the Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard, also known as the Charities (FRS 102) SORP.

The trustees confirm that the Annual Report and financial statements comply with the current statutory requirements, the requirements of the governing document and the provisions of the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP). Exemptions from disclosure: this annual report does not omit or withhold any reference or administrative details.

With thanks to our supporters

Underground Lights would like to thank all the people who have given their time and money to help us continue our work, and particularly:

The Belgrade Theatre	Groundwork - Tesco Bags of Help	Crisis
Tudor Trust	Coventry City of Culture Trust	Albert Hunt Charitable Trust
Heart of England Community Foundation	Arts and Homelessness International	National Survivor User Network
Shop Front Theatre		



Including photographs by Jamie Gray, Nicola Young and Mandip Seehra.

PUBLIC BENEFIT STATEMENT

In reviewing our aims, objectives and activities, the Trustees have taken into account the Charity Commission's general guidance

on public benefit. The Trustees ensure that the activities undertaken are always in line with the charitable aims and objectives as set out in Underground Lights' constitution.