

Equality and Diversity Case Studies
Directorate: Regeneration and Culture
Service: Culture and Recreation

Title: Cheshire Rural Touring Arts (CRTA) – access to high quality arts in rural places.

Introduction:

CRTA (a shared service, hosted by CWAC) delivers high quality performing arts to 26 rural communities across Cheshire. Each venue we work with is run by a volunteer promoter or team of promoters from that community. The scheme is an ongoing programme of work which delivers 2 seasons of performing arts events each year in spring and autumn. The CRTA has also created and delivered a number of developmental projects to help increase engagement in activity and nurture future audiences.

Challenges:

It has been a challenge over the years to ensure that access to events has been achieved for the widest rural community involvement. This includes enabling that people of all ages to have performances on offer that are relevant and of interest to them and that people with disabilities are not faced with barriers to attending events.

It has also been a challenge to programme high quality diverse arts events in the region.

How the challenges were overcome:

Rural involvement: CRTA has been building its profile in rural areas for 14 years. We work closely with volunteers in rural communities to ensure that they are supported in hosting, promoting and presenting high quality arts work in their communities. We ensure that we have a wide range of rural locations in our scheme and that rural communities are aware of the work on offer to them locally.

Age: In order to help build future audiences and engage a wide range of ages in our work we have set 2 development projects. The rural youth project (14-18

year olds) which has been running since 2005 helps to build connections with isolated rural young people and provide them with opportunities to engage with the arts. This work is in partnership with Action Transport theatre and Connexions youth services. We also have created a scheme called the Mini Network (2004-2010), which engages rural young people under 5 years old, and their families through working with Sure Start Centres, schools, nurseries and Children's services in the area. This project provides high quality performances and workshops to rural children and their families who may not otherwise have access to such work.

Diversity: We created a diversity and equality policy document, which outlined how we programme diverse work and help enable communities to access such work. We programme at least one piece of work from a company of diverse background or content each season.

Disability: The Village hall venues we work with have a wide variety disabled facilities. In order to inform the public attending what each venue has, we hired a disability consultant (Judith Sefton) to visit each venue and provide us with a range of symbols to show what facilities each venue can offer in terms of Car Parking, ramps/steps, toilet facilities, hearing loops and wheelchair access . These are then published in each seasons brochure. We also offer our seasonal brochure in brail and large print.

Outcomes:

Rural involvement: We have 26 rural venues across Cheshire involved in the CRTA. Each venue has strong community links and is managed by local volunteers and well used by the rural communities it serves. The work is ongoing so we aim to constantly assess and improve our service.

Age: The rural youth project has produced 2 very successful tours which produced 2 original plays, created by young people and professionally produced. The pieces were toured back to rural youth groups. The project is now in its 3rd phase which had been produced in partnership with Action Transport theatre company. This project will culminate in a rural tour in autumn 2011. The Mini Network has been a very successful project and involved over 5000 young people and their families. Funding for the Mini Network expired in Dec 2010, but a bid is currently in with Youth Music for another 2 year project for 2011-2013. Contacts with the families and education groups involved in the Mini Network are being maintained and we will be building on those contacts over the next few years to bring in new audiences for CRTA work, by programming further family and early years centred work.



Diversity: Each season we programme at least one piece of diverse work in our season. Promoters are diversity aware and confident in choosing and promoting diverse work in their communities. Audience feedback for a range of diverse work has been very positive.

Disability: Up to date access symbols for each venue are a permanent fixture, published in each season brochure. Promoters are disability aware and able to answer queries about their venues access from public enquires.

What we could have done better: Our equality and diversity policies are constantly changing and adapting to meet the requirements and needs of our communities, funders and priorities. We constantly review our rural, age, diversity and disability issues throughout the year, to ensure that we are reaching the widest possible audience and supporting as many people as possible to experience high quality arts in rural places.

