

MEETING: 25/07/2019

Ref: 15266

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY: Bridging Divides - Connecting the Capital

Stratford Circus Arts Centre

Adv: Geraldine Page

Base: Newham

Amount requested: £71,988

Benefit: Newham

Amount recommended: £72,000

The Applicant

Stratford Circus Arts Centre (SCAC) is a performing arts centre and registered charity dedicated to bringing high quality arts experiences and participatory opportunities to local audiences in Newham and East London. Built in 2001, the fully accessible venue includes 2 theatres, a dance studio and meeting rooms. The charity is proud that its audiences are largely comprised of local families and include people who have little experience or knowledge of the arts. SCAC offers a number of participatory groups including baby dance, a youth choir, leap of faith (older dance), age-well actors and singers and Blue Sky Actors – of which this application is concerned.

The Application

This application is for two years continuation funding towards the running costs of the flagship Blue Sky Actors performing arts group for adult actors with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which you initially funded in 2016. The group has been running for over 13 years and provides valuable opportunities for its members not only to perform but to build friendships and social networks.

The Recommendation

SCAC has a strong track record of working with learning-disabled people. It offers an accessible venue for disabled participants and audiences with moveable seating, wide aisles, accessible toilets and dressing rooms, hearing loops, lifts and regular access training. It has strong links to the local community, arts companies as well as care and education providers. As a disability-led ensemble Blue Sky Actors aims are founded on inclusive theatre which includes challenging prejudice, raising the profile of disability-led arts and supporting disabled adults to realise their potential. Funding is recommended:

£72,000 over 2 further and final years (2 x £36,000) towards the running costs of the Blue Sky Actors project.

Funding History

Meeting Date	Decision
14/07/2016	£93,240 over 3 years (3 x £31,080) towards the salaries of the Education Manager (5¼ hours/week) and Project Coordinator (9¾ hours/week); the sessional costs of the Artistic Director, Assistant Director, and Artistic Support Workers; and the running costs of the Blue Sky Actors project.

Background and detail of proposal

The existing project has been very successful and with your funding Blue Sky Actors will continue to meet for weekly 3-hour rehearsals (3 terms of 10 weeks each). Your funding will;

- Support the creation and development of two high-quality productions annually by adults with disabilities and learning difficulties. This comprises of

skills development for individuals, masterclasses and workshops in theatre skills and weekly rehearsals with professional artistic staff.

- Provide personal and professional development of individuals using goal setting with support to enable participants to work towards aims throughout the project.
- Support for lead actors with their individual projects, including support with auditions and productions, empowering and encouraging them to be role models for other actors with disabilities and the wider community.

The beneficiaries are local people from Newham and other London Boroughs and membership of Blue Sky Actors totals 30. Many people with disabilities face ongoing routine discrimination leading to low self-esteem and aspirations. This project supports increased positive visibility and engagement of Disabled People, reducing stigma and opening opportunities for participation in all aspects of life. SCAC is situated in one of the most culturally diverse and yet socio-economically deprived boroughs in the country with very low levels of arts engagement. Disabled people are particularly limited in their cultural opportunities, due to access and other barriers, and have an average national engagement rate of 50%. With an overall engagement rate in Newham of less than 20% and the closure of Day Opportunities Service, the level of engagement by disabled residents is less than 10%.

Financial Information

Since your original grant SCAC have employed a Development Manager to diversify income streams and increase their ability to leverage grant funding as well as individual and corporate giving. Reserves are still a way off target, but the Trustees are currently reviewing their reserves policy and will include a business model to increase unrestricted reserves. The cost of raising funds was not included in the 2018 accounts and this has been pointed out to SCAC by your Officer.

Year end as at 31 March	2018 Audited Accounts	2019 Draft	2020 Budget
Income & expenditure:			
Income	1,317,487	1,576,561	1,479,815
- % of Income confirmed as at 26/04/19		100%	92%
Expenditure	(1,373,887)	(1,492,414)	(1,477,518)
Total surplus/(deficit)	(56,400)	84,147	2,297
Split between:			
- Restricted surplus/(deficit)	14,597	68,446	30,993
- Unrestricted surplus/(deficit)	(70,997)	15,701	(28,696)
	(56,400)	84,147	2,297
Cost of Raising Funds	Not Included	41,843	45,000
- % of Income		2.7%	3.0%
Operating expenditure (unrestricted funds)	1,046,851	1,200,718	1,148,171
Free unrestricted reserves:			
Free unrestricted reserves held at year end	31,811	47,512	18,816
No of months of operating expenditure	0.4	0.5	0.2
Reserves policy target	180,000	180,000	180,000
No of months of operating expenditure	2.1	1.8	1.9
Free reserves over/(under) target	(148,189)	(132,488)	(161,184)