

**MEETING: 27/07/2017**

**Ref: 14010**

**ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Resettlement and Rehabilitation of Offenders**

**Synergy Theatre Project**

**Adv: Sandra Davidson**

**Amount requested: £93,709**

**Base: Southwark**

**Benefit: London-wide**

**Amount recommended: £93,700**

**The Charity**

Established in 2000, Synergy Theatre Project (STP) works towards rehabilitation and resettlement of prisoners, ex-prisoners and young people at risk of offending. Using theatre and related artistic activities to raise awareness of the wider issues surrounding criminal justice, STP challenges offender stereotypes. Their work is founded on the belief that theatre can be transformative and can contribute to building a more positive future for all. STP is committed to artistic excellence, believing it to be an integral part of achieving its mission.

STP's work comprises the following strands of activity:

- Theatre productions performed by prisoners and ex-prisoners working alongside professionals in prisons, theatres and schools;
- Education programmes targeting young people at risk of offending – delivered by professional practitioners supported by trained ex-prison facilitators, comprising an annual touring production and bespoke projects;
- New writing programmes cultivating plays by those with experience of the criminal justice system;
- Synergy Studio, a theatre based training, work placement and employment programme for prisoners and ex-prisoners to develop specific creative and broader work-related transferable skills, aiding the transition from resettlement to work.

Since 2000, Synergy has produced: 28 productions, including 6 specifically for young people, 33 courses with prisoners and ex-prisoners, 73 young people's projects, 3 prison scriptwriting competitions, 50 rehearsed readings and 2 short films. Over 1,300 prisoners and ex-prisoners and 4,000 young people at risk have participated in projects, reaching audiences over 35,000.

Synergy's current annual programme includes 2 productions, 8 courses, 9 bespoke young people's projects and 24 role play training sessions, impacting approximately 120 prisoners/ex-prisoners, 300 young people at risk of offending and audiences of 1,700.

**The Application**

The charity is seeking support for its core running costs to continue and to enable it to scale up activity and widen access for prisoners/ex-prisoners. The creative programme is building on existing work which will engage beneficiaries inside prison and offer a range of practical opportunities upon release, including involvement in theatre projects; and training in performance, stage management, script writing and film. STP will continue to offer accreditation, work placements, and employment, both within the organisation and through a range of partnerships with external organisations, strengthening progression opportunities for beneficiaries.

**The Recommendation**

STP engages the public with the lives, voices and experiences of those in the criminal justice system through its productions and debates. It is well run with a clear

policy to reach diverse, mixed audiences that bring together mainstream arts attenders, criminal justice/rehabilitative professionals, prisoners, ex-prisoners and young people at risk of offending as appropriate for each production:

***£93,700 over three years (£30,400; £31,300; £32,000) towards 25% of the full-time Artistic Director's salary and the General Manager's salary, and associated project costs of a creative programme to support prisoners/ex-prisoners.***

### **Funding History**

Meeting Date	Decision
08/07/2010	£74,000 over three years (£22,000; £23,500; £28,500) towards the salary costs of an Education Manager and running costs of a project to train and support ex-offenders in drama-related projects.

### **Background and detail of proposal**

STP has developed strong working relationships with internationally renowned arts and education partners including: V&A, Young Vic, Royal Opera House, Unicorn Theatre, Theatre 503 and Morley College to name a few. Existing evidence, including that from STP reports demonstrates the criminal justice system contains disproportionately high number of disadvantaged groups:

- 26% of female and 16% of male prisoners stated they received treatment for a mental health issue in the year before entering custody.
- 47% of prisoners have no qualifications.
- 26% of the prison population (22,079 people) are from a minority ethnic group. This compares to around 1 in 10 of the general population.
- Less than 1% of all children in England are in care, but 33% of men and 61% of women in custody have been in care.

Upon release prisoners face multiple, and often overwhelming, difficulties and disadvantage. Many have personal issues such as addiction and substance misuse, in addition to a volatile or inadequate home life. Many find it almost impossible to overcome the stigma associated with being an ex-prisoner when trying to find employment or continue their education. Active engagement in STP's projects provides a focus and encourages the development of creative skills and helps overcome negative attitudes and unhelpful patterns of thinking and behaviour – key to reducing re-offending. Feedback is sought from project members at all stages of a project, which enables the staff team to monitor their personal rehabilitative progress. Of the participants of the programme over the last year 98% have not re-offended, 64% are in further or higher education and 95% report increased skills and self-esteem. STP has built a solid reputation for the quality of its work and is well respected in the field of arts and criminal justice, providing holistic, cohesive support to beneficiaries.

### **Financial Information**

STP receives significant funding from the Big Lottery, with support from various Trusts and Foundations. The charity advises that the increase in expenditure forecast for the current year is due to staff expansion following a recent strategic review. The Trustees' policy is to build up reserves equivalent to of three months

personnel cost. As part of their Strategic Plan over the next three years, the charity aims to generate income from new funding streams and earned income from Synergy Services to achieve an increase in unrestricted reserves.

Year end as at 31st May	FY 15/16	FY 16/17	FY 17/18
	Examined Accounts	Draft Accounts	Forecast
	£	£	£
<b>Income &amp; expenditure:</b>			
Income	325,989	388,672	484,072
- % of Income confirmed as at 22/06/17	n/a	n/a	54%
Expenditure	(309,697)	(382,779)	(488,516)
Total surplus/(deficit)	<b>16,292</b>	<b>5,893</b>	<b>(4,444)</b>
Split between:			
- Restricted surplus/(deficit)	0		0
- Unrestricted surplus/(deficit)	16,292	5,893	(4,444)
	<b>16,292</b>	<b>5,893</b>	<b>(4,444)</b>
Cost of Raising Funds	24,250	20,471	21,376
- % of income	7.4%	5.3%	4.4%
Operating expenditure (unrestricted funds)	37,293	35,361	75,523
<b>Free unrestricted reserves:</b>			
Free unrestricted reserves held at year end	41,052	46,945	42,501
No of months of operating expenditure	13.2	15.9	6.8
Reserves policy target	39,344	47,031	52,678
No of months of operating expenditure	12.7	16.0	8.4
Free reserves over/(under) target	1,708	(86)	(10,177)