

## Written evidence submitted by Futures Theatre

We are a small touring and original writing theatre company (est 1992). We challenge injustices that prevent marginalised women from realising their creative and life potential. We do this by engaging excluded women in long-term creative engagement programs, by producing uncompromising theatre about female stories and through our innovative training programs for social workers who work with vulnerable women. Our engagement projects for excluded and isolated women are co-produced with professional female artists and delivered in partnership with grass-roots women's charities and organisations. These partnerships have enabled us to engage with women who are in street prostitution, involved in the criminal justice system and affected by domestic abuse.

For us, this crisis has meant:

- Halting the development of a new production that was in the R&D phase
- Furloughing 50% of the staff team,
- Pausing a long-term creative project working directly with women survivors of DV
- A decline in fundraising applications as funders close funds except for frontline Covid:19 activities

Furloughing has provided some support for organisations but the support for freelance artists has not gone nearly far enough.

We cannot go for government loans. We're concerned going forward that our business model will not sustain the repayment of loans (even if we were granted them). We believe this is likely to be similar for many other small organisations, particularly those who, like us, do a lot of work in the community or with marginalised groups.

Long term we face a significant financial risk. While we are currently in a fortunate position in comparison to other theatre companies and not at immediate risk of closure, 90% of our income from Trusts & Foundations/ Arts Council is for specific projects and this lack of unrestricted income puts us in a precarious position whilst we are currently unable to deliver those projects.

We believe it will become harder to get funding and that venues we would ordinarily partner with will become more risk-averse and reliant on commercially viable projects. It seems likely that many small venues who would have traditionally been our partners will close permanently because of this pandemic, which will have a ripple affect among the smaller organisations and artists who work with them.

Support needed:

- Flexible furloughing arrangements. Changing how we work going forward needs investment to enable the time to switch our traditional ways of working. As a small (4 f/t employees) company it's hard to furlough staff without losing vital skills to keep the company afloat and be business ready when needed. A part time furlough model would be fairer to our staff and also respond best to the companies needs of a variety of skills.
- Grants for core costs and new projects responding in the social justice/arts sector. Long-term this pandemic will have the greatest impact on vulnerable members of our society and companies like our can be an important part of a holistic offer to support these individuals and communities. Small companies are doing vital work within our culture and don't have a sustainable business models as often they are working with the most vulnerable, who are without access to personally fund participation. Government funding channels need to support core costs, as companies that receive large proportions of their income from Trusts and Foundations are susceptible to hits in the economy that reduce this funding. They also don't have the fundraising personnel to write the many bids

necessary. Over the years we're now in competition with organisations that have been set up that use to be part of councils and have much more backing in both financial and practical resources.

- Greater support for freelance artists who are the backbone of this industry
- There's understandably been general support offered for immediate hardship. We'd like to see longer term (6-18 months) survival support being put into place. This will small charities and companies in the arts/social justice sectors the much needed opportunity to plan and grow to thrive again.

Ways the sector will evolve:

- We'll be creating far more content virtually, allowing for greater access, but many smaller companies do not have the necessary hardware/software or technical expertise to do this - this will need additional support, particularly for creative engagement work, as this would have to filter down to participants who often are in low socio-economic groups and therefore do not have the hardware to access virtual sessions. There are people in the country who do not have internet access and so cannot make use of the various online content currently being offered.