



Revised July 2018

Impact Study





Creating Community Through Theatre

A few of the number of positive comments from local residents who are involved with SAVVY Theatre Company:

“Changed my life”

“Provides me with an escape from reality”

“SAVVY has literally saved my life”

“SAVVY is therapy and family”

There are no auditions required to be part of the SAVVY Theatre Company – everyone is welcome. It is a fully inclusive and diverse company with all kinds of people making up the SAVVY ‘family’.

Thank you for bringing us the audience (and quite clearly your cast) such JOY!



The years of memories created at SAVVY were without a doubt some of the most cherished.



You guys are going that extra mile to make theatre unique and awesome.

The following are just a few examples of the people who have been supported by SAVVY.

- Brenda, an older lady, has been with SAVVY from the very beginning. Brenda became involved as part of the company's first intergenerational project. She is now 93 and, until recently, was still taking part in productions (her last one was Romeo & Juliet at Honeywood Museum). The Girl on the Platform was an original piece developed by SAVVY and based on Brenda's life as an evacuee in WWII. Brenda is visited by SAVVY staff on a regular basis which helps to keep her involved with productions – and all of the gossip!
- Bernie is non-verbal and when she joined SAVVY would rarely interact with people. Now (although still non-verbal), communicates happily with staff who have trained in specialist communication skills in order to ensure Bernie was fully included in the Action Replay Group. This has helped her come on in leaps and bounds. (Many parents/carers used to not tell SAVVY staff things about people wanting to be involved in drama, but are happy to do so now and know that whatever issues there are, they will be fully accepted and supported by the staff team.)
- Dan is SAVVY's lighting designer and operator and came to us via work experience from Blooming Arts and was keen to learn about lights and lighting design. Dan worked at the Secombe Theatre in Sutton with the Action Replay Group and managed the lighting for the annual Christmas productions. He did so well that SAVVY took him to the National Theatre Connections Festival in Chichester and Dan has also worked at the Young Vic Theatre in London. SAVVY has organised for him to have training on programme lighting with money from the Sutton Community Fund to run the training.





- Some of the costumes that have been designed by local students have been on display at Honeywood.
- A young woman who was enthusiastic about being a photographer but couldn't afford a camera was supported by SAVVY to apply to Arts Network Sutton for funding. Her application was successful and she has built up a portfolio of work both with SAVVY and other community groups in Sutton who were in need of publicity photographs.
- With funding from Awards for All, Sheree Vickers worked with Mind the Gap in Bradford and realised that there were limited opportunities for people with learning disabilities in Sutton to develop as professional artists and facilitators. SAVVY began working with a group of people with learning disabilities and helped a young man called Aaran. Aaran facilitated drama workshops at Wallington Girls and Carew Manor and has since worked as an assistant director on some of SAVVY Theatre's productions.
- Take-2 is a new group running on a Wednesday and was started due to the ever-extending waiting list for Action Replay. This group started in September 2016 and is now full.
- Ryan is on the autistic spectrum and has parents with additional needs, his place is paid for by the London Borough of Sutton.

Case Study

Michelle and SAVVY

Michelle is a wife and mother and full time carer for her son Peter who has a learning disability and her husband who has Type 1 diabetes as well as other health issues.

Until eighteen months ago, Michelle also cared for her mother who sadly passed away. Michelle had her first Carer Assessment three years ago, at which point her son Peter was able to have a Personal Assistant and this was the first time that the family had ever accessed statutory sector support.

The first thing that Michelle said to me about her involvement with the SAVVY Theatre Company was that it provided her with an "...escape from reality." Michelle was incredibly upbeat and full of enthusiasm for the costume and props work that she is providing on a completely voluntary basis for the Theatre Company.



Michelle's son Peter has been attending SAVVY's Action Replay group for seven years. This group was originally funded by Sutton Mencap working with SAVVY but, when that funding came to an end, the SAVVY Theatre Company applied for funding to keep it going as it was providing much needed support for the cohort of local people with learning disabilities who would otherwise have no opportunity to take part in dramatic productions.

Michelle became more involved when she began attending, when Peter was having seizures and needed his carer to be close at hand. It was at this time that Michelle offered to help with making costumes and she has been designing, making, adapting and redesigning costumes and props for all of SAVVY's performances ever since.

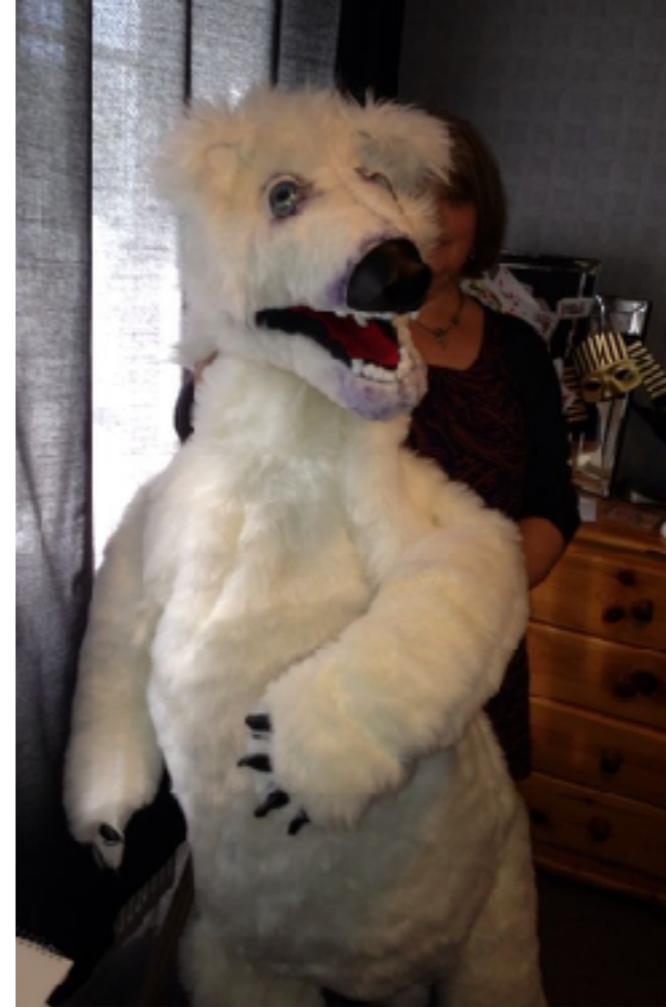
Last year Michelle began recruiting other Mums and carers to add to the voluntary costume and props team. Michelle uses Squirrels Community Scrap Scheme for costume materials and other materials for making props and has become a volunteer for Squirrels too.

Michelle told me that she would never want to be on stage but that she loves working behind the scenes - and her work and that of her team is really appreciated by Sheree Vickers and the theatre management team. Michelle has also co-delivered workshops with Sheree at the Royal Academy of Dance teaching children on their summer programme how to make masks which has added to her skills and professional development.

Sheree was saying how much respect the boys at Wandle Valley School have for Michelle because of her work with SAVVY. Michelle's son Peter also attends the other groups with his Mum which has given him access to other groups of people and allowed him to make new friends.

Michelle currently uses her garage and another room in her house as her workshop which can cause problems for her husband when she has people coming around to be fitted for costumes. Michelle was saying that having a SAVVY home venue which she can use for storage and fittings will make a big difference.

Michelle's involvement with the SAVVY Theatre Company has "changed her life".





Case Study

Ami and SAVVY Theatre Company

Ami has struggled with mental health issues for a large part of her life. At one point, they were so serious that Ami was at a point where she didn't want to leave the house. Ami has always loved drama and after some research her mother found out about the SAVVY Theatre Company and what it was doing in the London Borough of Sutton. Although initially a bit sceptical about going along - because Ami felt that other drama groups weren't always welcoming - she gave SAVVY a try and from the moment she first stepped through the door she was greeted with open arms and made to feel a part of the SAVVY 'family'. Ami joined the SAVVY 'Young Company' in 2011 and has felt that SAVVY is her second home ever since.

There were other children and young people attending who had mental health issues too, others had been in care and some had different challenges but all had been greeted and welcomed in to SAVVY in the same inclusive manner. Throughout the time that Ami has been with the company she and other young people have found that they can support one another with their mental health challenges and can share their feelings and know that they won't be 'judged'. SAVVY Theatre Company doesn't expect anyone to audition for productions; if people are keen to join and happy to abide by SAVVY's inclusive rules then they are welcomed. This results in the company having an eclectic skill set amongst its members which is often what makes the productions so successful.

Ami met her 'best friend' at SAVVY, a girl who was bipolar and who had been welcomed by SAVVY and supported in her condition. Sadly, Ami's friend took her own life and Ami found comfort, compassion and understanding from the SAVVY 'family' who helped her through the difficult process of coming to terms with her friend's death and who grieved with her.

Ami was supported by Sutton CAMHS (the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) when she was younger and is now being supported by Adult Mental Health Services in Sutton. Ami feels that the time that she spends with SAVVY and the support that she receives from people there has been of more use to her than statutory mental health support.

When the Young Company moved to Riddlesdown and Ami was at college in Kingston it made it impossible for her to attend SAVVY to perform but she missed the company so much that she offered to volunteer with the Action Replay Group which met in Sutton. The Action Replay Group offers drama coaching and performance opportunities for people with learning disabilities and Ami really enjoyed helping.



Ami had had reservations about joining the Adult Company at SAVVY as she felt that there was a very different energy in that company compared to the Young Company. Once other young people from the Young Company transferred to the Adult Company though, Ami found it much easier to join in and rekindle friendships with her former acting colleagues. Ami has a friend who drives and he is able to pick her up and drive her to Riddlesdown.

The transition was fully supported by the SAVVY staff team.

Having a permanent 'home' will make such a difference now and will enable them to do even more to support people from some of the borough's more marginalised and less included communities. Ami feels that she is unlikely to be able to cope with working full time but would love to find some part time work that allows her to continue with SAVVY. It was a pleasure talking to Ami who couldn't say enough about the positive impact that the SAVVY Theatre Company has had on her life and the difference that being a part of it all has on her confidence and self-esteem.

Case Study

Alex and SAVVY Theatre Company

To say that your theatre company has had a positive impact on my son Alex, is an understatement.

Alex loves film and is a good mimic. He could always recite scenes from films, but on his own or to us. SAVVY has allowed Alex to do something positive with that interest and to implement those acting skills and put them to a positive use. He is being taught to engage with others, to follow instruction, to learn lines, to work as part of a team, to help others, and to work hard to achieve something good.

Alex loves coming to SAVVY. It means a lot to him and he feels very proud to be a member of it. He came to it not knowing anyone in the group but has made friends. He feels understood. He knows that at SAVVY you understand Autism and learning disability and he always talks positively about each session.

He is happy and his self-esteem is much higher than it has ever been. We see that as a big improvement. Alex feels safe and comfortable in your group.

Hearing our son have hope is powerfully moving. He has never had that before!

SAVVY has given him that Hope! You believe in him. You make him feel valued and you encourage him to develop and improve and get better at acting. You are inspiring him to

believe in his own abilities. That's amazing. You are to be commended on that!

He has aspirations to do more acting. He wants it and is now willing to do the work to make his dream a reality. You have given him new opportunities to be in two shows and he has loved them. He was so very proud of being in the bigger role in The Man With The Golden Banana and for us to see our son find direction; realise what he loves and what he wants to do in life is wonderful and reassuring.

Your drama group is the best Alex has been too by far. You develop the individual. You see their potential and you help them improve. You positively bring them forward. You are so inclusive. The shows represent the 'valuing of each member of the cast and valuing everyone's contribution'. We are so impressed with the professionalism, your enthusiasm, your inclusiveness and the positivity. It is lively, exciting, forward thinking, dynamic and most of all inspirational. What you manage to bring together in those shows is so moving and heart-warming.



The impact Savvy has on its members is massive. You have taught my son, more than any other school or college environment, is to believe in himself. To believe in his abilities and to value himself and what he can do! His contribution is meaningful. It has taught him to have aspirations! To have a dream and to work hard towards achieving his dream! You have - in his words - given him "hope".

Thank you for all you are doing. Excellent and amazing work.

Jane Sparks, Mother of Alex Morrall

Some statements from Alex Morrall, aged 21, on his involvement with SAVVY:

- I started SAVVY on July 24th 2016 and I love it. If you are not confident they find a way to change that so that you are. They teach you to do the scene and you will find that you can be honest, and be comfortable and then take the opportunity. When you can do it, you feel happy, proud, excited and relieved.
- Before SAVVY I was nervous and could only do acting on my own. SAVVY gave me the chance to do two shows. In the Egyptian Pirates, I had a small part but I wanted more, so in the next show, The Man With the Golden Banana, they gave me a bigger role! I loved it! They believed in me.
- I am more inspired to read, learn, practice, rehearse and try harder.
- I have Autism and a learning disability, SAVVY understand that and get me. They make the group fun, friendly, nice, relaxed, and everyone treats each other well. We help each other. I look forward to it each week and I love it.
- I think SAVVY is great and I am proud to be with them and part of them.



Case Study

Our work with Wandle Valley School

Our working relationship with Wandle Valley (an SEMH Academy for both primary and secondary pupils), began with a year-long Heritage Lottery Funded project, where pupils from Wandle Valley worked alongside pupils from Carew Manor (an SEN Academy), learning all about the history of the borough's Grade-1 listed building. Throughout the year they took part in a variety of different drama & arts-related workshops, including making medieval music, taking ghostly photographs, filming, jousting and learning to fight with weapons.

All of the work they created on this project can still be found online at: <http://savvytheatre.wixsite.com/carewmanor>

Initially we stayed on to work with the group who took part in the original Carew Manor project, but slowly the group (and drama's reputation) grew. Over the years we've had pupils take part in a number of events including showcases with our other SAVVY Theatre Company groups, specialist workshops and theatre trips.

We also started the annual Christmas show, where staff and pupils perform together. We currently offer AQA qualifications and selected pupils can also work with us 1:1 on their Arts Award (from Discover through to Silver level).



In addition to the work at the school, we started to offer Wandle pupils scholarship places to take part in our weekly Young Company. Reunelle was one of the first pupils to receive a scholarship and spent 3 years with us at SAVVY Theatre, taking part in a mountain of projects, including the National Theatre's Connections Festival and working alongside our Action Replay group (for adults with learning disabilities). He left us and went on to study at the Brit School in Croydon. Last year he made a choice, gave up performing and got signed by West Ham football club instead!



Chris is another success story. He didn't get the grades for his first choice at college and in frustration threw his bag across the floor. His Silver Arts Award fell out and was picked up by the head of Performing Arts. On the strength of his work with us he was accepted into Nescot and just completed his first show, where he took on the leading role (even singing) - and was brilliant!

Case Study

What SAVVY Did for Me

About a year before I joined Savvy, I was working in Durham full-time, while also studying for a master's degree part-time. As you can imagine, trying to do both had always been stressful, but up until summer 2017 I had coped without too many problems.

Unfortunately, during summer 2017, when I had a big and terrifyingly complex piece of coursework to write, stress got the better of me. I had about three months of what I'd describe as 'chronic panic'. I barely slept, and the constant worry I felt often made me physically sick. Eventually, defeated, I ended up quitting my job and moved back to the family home in South London.

When my dissertation loomed in September 2017, I tried to pinpoint what I had previously got so wrong and tried to take steps to avoid these things happening again (my project from summer had got done and handed in on time but was hardly my best work). I decided that one of the reasons I had struggled was that I hadn't been able to give my mind a break from my studies. Sure, I had gone on long walks around Durham to clear my head, but that was only ever a temporary fix. As soon as I got back to my desk, the overwhelming feeling of utter dread that extreme stress brings would return almost immediately. I wrote down a list of things I could change to make writing the dissertation less overbearing. Joining a club to occupy myself with was somewhere on that list. I did a quick search for things to do in my area and ended up joining Savvy.

Fast forward nine months, and the most prominent feeling I get whenever I go to a Savvy rehearsal or a show has been one of awe genuine. Sheree, Alice and Lewis who have all directed or co-directed me while I have been at Savvy, have a keen imagination with regards to how everything will work and fit together. They understand and interpret not just why the characters on stage are behaving the way they are, their motivations and reservations, but also how to best relay these same feelings to an audience. It's an art which requires skills of both a storyteller and a psychologist.

It is always a fascinating process to both watch and be a part of. Everything from the movement of the performers to the costumes and props is carefully considered and planned.

Each line isn't just rehearsed, it's analysed, meticulously, over and over. During rehearsals for our summer 2018 show, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, so much thought was given to the text that single passages became a kaleidoscope of nuance which could then be applied to the performance a countless number of ways.

It is worth remembering that this is only referring to the part of Savvy which I am involved in, The Adult Company. The amount of work Sheree, Alice, and the other core members do with the other theatre companies which make up Savvy is nothing short of astounding. Not only in the sheer volume of work they take on, but how well they cope with the multitude of challenges presented. I have watched performances by Savvy's Take 2 and Action Replay theatre companies involving kids and adults with a huge variety of mental and physical handicaps and been blown away by what Sheree, Alice and the performers on stage have managed to bring together.



Finally; there are the things about Savvy which are personal to me. I've met new, interesting and wonderful people, many of who I hope will be lifelong friends, it's rekindled an interest in theatre which I'd forgotten existed and it's filled my time with wonderful (and often bizarre) activities on days which I'd otherwise spend vegetating.

Most importantly of all, it has improved my state of mind and mental wellbeing profoundly. I have chronic insomnia, which will never go away entirely (its spike in severity was one of the causes behind my miserable summer last year), but I'm currently sleeping more soundly at night than I have in years. I feel happier, worry less, and feel I have far more energy than I did a year ago. Writing my dissertation still proved to be still stressful at times, but it became much easier to let go of that stress by both looking forward to the next Savvy show and by drawing inspiration from how hard Sheree and Alice are working.

I joined Savvy, originally, with a mind to work behind the scenes and generally help with the shows. In being thrown straight into the deep end as a cast member, Savvy pulled me out of myself when I needed it, and in doing so has helped me far more than I could ever give back.

Thank you so much.

Neil Bonwick, Adult Company Member

