

THOSE WORKING AT THE PROJECT

Those working at the Project include - resident artists and visiting artists - those under long-term and those under short-term contract - those working full-time and those working part-time - and volunteers from the region, the UK and abroad. Advertisements are placed for paid work (and some volunteering) in magazines and periodicals which reflect the interests and aspirations of the groups which are discriminated against or disadvantaged - and information about such opportunities is shared with personal contacts and networks who are known to combat discrimination. All those who respond to such advertisements and information receive a comprehensive package of information about the Project, its aims and objects, programming, and current work opportunities. In order to combat the disadvantages which may be suffered by those who, for a variety of reasons, may not do justice to themselves on an application form, the Project endeavours to interview ALL THOSE who complete a form. The interviewing itself takes an extended form, with the Project providing overnight accommodation where appropriate, thus allowing for an in depth exchange and assessment on both sides. It is usual for the interviewing team to include members who are themselves from groups which are disadvantaged or discriminated against. And other workers at the Project and long term users of the Project - with an understanding of the Project's aims and objectives - are given an opportunity to make an input into the assessment. The interviewing team receive training in equal opportunities procedures for interviews. As to positive action, then the Project has always aimed to provide opportunities for those born and brought up within areas of urban deprivation to overcome educational disadvantage through a mixture of work and associated education. Of the first three black workers to emerge from the city as fully qualified youth and community leaders then two emerged through the Project, and were supported by the Project both prior to and through college and both educationally and financially. The first young black dancer to travel to New York to study with the Dance Theatre of Harlem emerged through the Project. And currently the Project is supporting a young black woman born and brought up in the inner city to become one of the first such fully qualified social workers in the city. The Project has always made special provision for school leavers, making such opportunities known locally, and providing those taking up such opportunities with both work experience and associated education. All the young people engaged in this way are provided with educational, travel, and cultural opportunities by the Project which are designed to assist them overcoming their disadvantages and determining their own future. This programme is now in something like its fifteenth year, and has many supported numbers of young people suffering multiple disadvantage to discover and exercise their multiple talents - from potters and jewellery making to music, song, and dance. Currently a young woman of seventeen (with a less than happy school experience) has gained the confidence after a year of work experience and associated education at the Project to gain a place on a Fringe course. The Project also provides a variety of specially created work and training opportunities for periods of from a month to one year. This programme of opportunities has been operational for some seven years now - and has enabled artists to develop or improve the skills required to work in a community context as well as enabling young graduates and others to re-determine the course of their career and to commit themselves to ongoing work with a community and cultural perspective. These opportunities have proved to be of benefit to a variety of young people, and have proved to be of particular benefit to women working in the arts. As the volunteers, then they are recruited on the broadest possible geographical basis with information as to

the opportunities being circulated to Eastern Europe and "Third World" countries as well as Western Europe and North America. Recruitment is on the basis of "self recruitment" with an open door policy for all volunteers wishing to share in the work and activities and prepared to stay for four weeks or longer (though exceptions are sometimes made to this latter rule). Volunteers have travelled from Africa, South America, Eastern Europe and Japan - and special arrangements are made for those travelling such distances to see and tour the region. Where monitoring indicates a bias in the self recruitment of volunteers then efforts are made to remedy this bias (for example, the Project has indicated to Volunteer Agencies in Turkey that women volunteers would be particularly welcomed). As to particular working arrangements then these may vary, and often do, from person to person depending on need, and in relation to the equal opportunities policy. Indeed the personal circumstances which may be the subject of discussion over an extended interview (or during the settling in of a volunteer) are raised in a positive manner so that particular needs may be met and problems solved. As a result of such discussions then

- special working arrangements have been made for religious observance
- special working arrangements have been made for individuals with health problems (asthma, etc.) or physical disabilities
- special working arrangements have been made for individuals with dependants
- special arrangements for baby sitting have been made on behalf of single parents
- etc. etc.

In general, everyone contributing to the work of the Project is assessed in terms of their educational and training needs and provision (resources, funding, time, and personnel) made accordingly, with priority given to those individuals from groups which are discriminated against or disadvantaged. The Project also has a policy of providing medical support where resources permit and where treatment required is not available within the NHS. The working situation at the Project means that all those working there can invite family and friends to join them while at work - or be near them while at work - and this has proved a particular advantage to those with a young family. All those working at the Project for periods of five years or more are eligible for a sabbatical period of from six months to one year. Underlying all these particulars is the basic working situation which is shared by all workers. Everyone has some involvement with young people - everyone is involved in creative activities - everyone is involved in what are conventionally called uncreative activities. All those working at the Project share, in their differing degrees and capacities, in the administration, maintenance, planning, and running of the Project. It is this sharing - across divisions of sex, age, class, education, national or ethnic origins, disability, etc. - which enables those coming from groups which are discriminated against or disadvantaged to discover and exercise their talents, and which provides an education for those who do not (at least at first sight) come from such groups. It is this sharing which is at the root of the Project's equal opportunities practice. Finally, it is conventional to say at the end of such reviews that all workers in the organisation are committed to the organisation's equal opportunities policy and practice - and this is of course essentially true of the Project's workers. But such statements are always an over simplification. The young lad coming straight from school in the inner city may be astonished to learn that his term of affection for his girlfriend, "my bird", is an offensive sexist remark, and he may find it far from easy to change his language - indeed there is one young worker at the Project currently committed to just such re-education. Other forms and terms of sexist and other discrimination may be less susceptible of immediate discovery but may be no less real for that (indeed they may be more dangerous and harmful simply because they are more covert). In a world which is peopled with discrimination it is impossible to engage workers without discrimination and without conscious or unconscious prejudice. The most any organisation can say is that there is a common agreement and will to work to make equal opportunities into a reality - to recognise that this will require personal, communal, and organisational changes and development - and that the implementation of equal opportunities will be a growth and a learning process for all concerned. This

much can be said of the Project and of the workers who work there.

Source URL:

<https://theblack-e.co.uk/content/about-us/equal-opportunities-policy-and-practice/those-working-project>