



RESTOKE
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Annual Report- 2020

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Restoke put the people of Stoke-on-Trent at the heart of creative adventures. We make performances and plan events that tackle social issues affecting our communities.

We bring people together who may not usually meet, forming bonds of friendship, understanding and solidarity in the city.

Our shows happen in buildings of historical or community significance which become transformed into temporary theatre spaces. Alongside our shows we run regular activities which focus on experiencing togetherness and collective joy for people of all ages. Collective joy to us is the joy of the shared experience, losing yourself in a dance, song, performance or celebration and finding yourself as a part of a community.

We started this year with the amazing news that we were successful in a funding application to Esmee Fairbairn for core-funding. This represented a huge step-change for Restoke, having always been a project-based organisation, core-funding gives us so much stability and increased capacity to be able to initiate more creative adventures with people in Stoke-on-Trent.

We were also gearing up for our new show MOTHER. Unfortunately, Covid-19 put a stop to our plans, and whilst we hoped this would be a temporary situation, we never could have imagined the whole of 2020 would be so affected by the pandemic.

You can read in this report the ways we adapted some creative activities, but we also reflected on how much bringing people together is absolutely fundamental to our creative process and those experiences that can only happen in the room. So, there has been some sadness in letting go of all the real-life experiences we would have had this year.

But this time to pause activity and reflect has brought new adventures to the forefront. One of our commitments this year was to find a venue which could serve as a home to Restoke and our ongoing creative workshops and events. After a lot of discussions, planning and funding applications we ended the year with the brilliant news that Arts Council England are investing £87,000 in the capital costs of restoring and reopening of the Ballroom at Fenton Town Hall as our new workplace and a community arts venue for Stoke-on-Trent.

Everything we've managed to achieve this year wouldn't have been possible without the flexibility and emergency grants from our funders. Alongside this we have felt supported by our friends and fans from all over the UK who have believed in us and galvanised us to be bigger and braver in our ambitions.

We hope 2021 will get brighter as quickly as possible, we can't wait to bring people together in the Ballroom!

Clare Reynolds & Paul Rogerson
(Directors)



MOTHER

After our research and development with artist-mothers in 2019 this year we were planning to co-create a new performance with mothers in Stoke-on-Trent. In January and February we carried out interviews with mothers in their homes. We ran open creative writing, dance and singing workshops and had many more planned.

Clare and associate artist Gabriella Gay were delivering weekly workshops at the Gingerbread Centre, a residential setting for families, until February. Alternating between creative writing and movement with additional guest artists, we had just realised an on-site creche service so mothers were able to take part whilst their children were being cared for nearby. This instantly increased the mothers who were able to take part but unfortunately only ran this way for 3 weeks before the first lockdown.

With additional funding from Voluntary Arts and Stoke-on-Trent City Council we were able to create, print and post 100 'Creative Packs' for mothers. These contained creative prompts on postcards and were sent out to mothers at Gingerbread Centre and more widely in Stoke-on-Trent. Creative Packs are still available to download through our website.

When lockdown meant we had to cancel workshops, we decided to keep the conversations going online. We carried out conversations over Zoom which were recorded and used to create a short video - Lockdown Mums. We will be developing this into a longer audio-installation which we plan to present in March 2021.

We were able to honour all our payments to the 11 freelance artists contracted on the mother project. Some of them are using their fees to explore their own creative responses to motherhood.

MOTHER

An invitation
to talk about motherhood

32
Conversations

11
Workshops

68
Participants

2.6K
Online Audience

“So happy to have found your group. Wish I had known about it months ago”

- What Now? Participant

“Like many I’m fed up with things now and running out of energy so I’m glad of folk like you who continue with your enthusiasm and energy.”

- Up Men Sing Member

600

Live Audience

1.2K

Online Audience

Up Men

2020 started on a high when the Up Men Sing choir performed at ‘Stoke Sings’ on stage at the Victoria Hall.

“Performing with Up Men was a remarkable start to my year, at the time I really needed something and to do something.”

- Up Men steering group member

“Amazing sound, jaw dropping emotion - just raw and perfect.”

- Audience member

Up Men also hosted a second workshop for people affected by suicide to come together and explore how creativity can support bereavement and prevention. This one included singing, sharing ideas and collecting the clay creations from last years workshop.

The Up Men continued to sing online and in parks when lockdown rules allowed. They also started a new podcast about Creativity and Connection. The Up Men Podcast is a series of conversations between artists and male participants in a range of creative projects in Stoke on Trent. They share their reflections on collective creativity and the benefits they experience through taking part. Two podcasts have been released with a further two in the planning/editing stages.

In October we ran a series of creative writing workshops with poet Jamie Thrasivoulou called “What Now?”. These workshops offered an opportunity to collectively reflect, and process the events of 2020, and reimagine how we might like things to change in the recovery from the pandemic.

These took place in person with limited numbers but were of so much value to the group that they continued online during the second lockdown and we intend to run alternate singing and creative writing sessions into the new year.

27

Workshops

32

Participants

Restoke Small Folk

Restoke Small folk moved online from June 2020. We have run creative dance sessions every Saturday on Zoom, choosing themes collectively and maintaining the spirit of creativity and ownership online. We also held a guest workshop with illustrator Rebecca Kremer.

36

Workshops

18

Participants



COVID-19 Response

Artist Support

We offered artists in Stoke-on-Trent and beyond support through informal conversations about: co-creation, participatory dance projects, project management, funding applications, finances, budgeting, setting up as a CIC, Zoom dance delivery, and socially-engaged performance. We also supported our associate artists and freelancers with emerging funding applications and led a co-creation learning session.

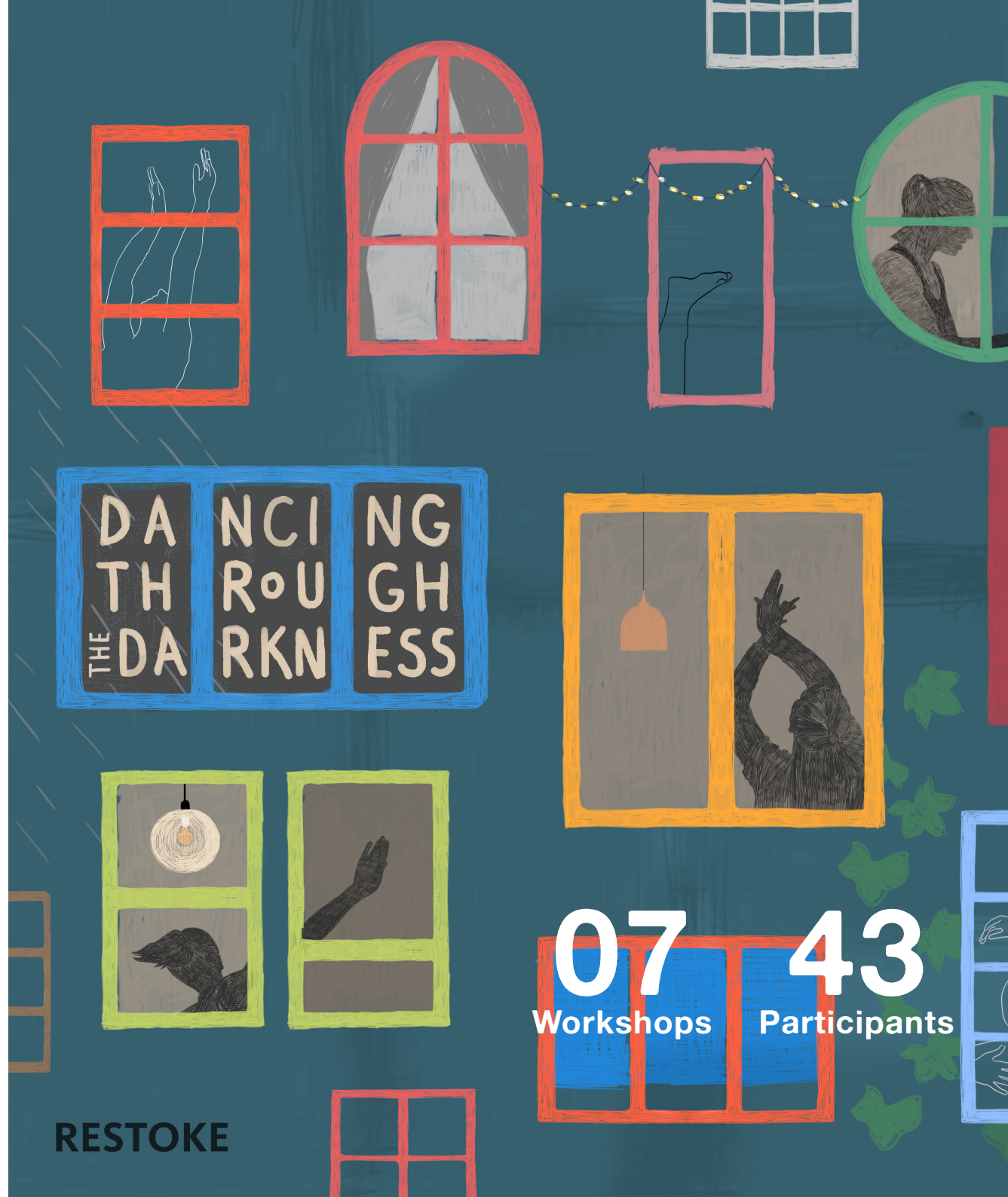
We supported a total of 16 artists from across the UK.

Dancing Through the Darkness

To inject some joy into the long winter of the pandemic, in November we started a 45-minute dance session on Tuesday mornings. The emphasis being on stretching, breathing deeply and joyful dancing from home.

“I feel so grateful to have to chance to move and bring some lightness into my week. Brilliantly facilitated for all abilities, almost feels like it’s in person and not over zoom!”

“Joined the session a little unsure as I haven’t danced for a very long time. What a warm, welcoming session with enough room to do your own version of stuff within a shared structure along with other human beings.”



The Ballroom


In December 2020 we received a capital grant from Arts Council England to restore and reopen the Ballroom at Fenton Town Hall as a brand-new community arts venue for Stoke-on-Trent!

Fenton Town Hall was converted into Magistrates Courts in the 1960s by The Ministry of Justice. The people of Fenton fought to ensure their Town Hall remained an asset of the local community when it was put up for sale in 2014. Justin Meath Baker (Baker & Co.), the great grandson of William Meath Baker who built the Town Hall, purchased the building in 2015 with a commitment that it continues to serve the community. Fenton Town Hall currently houses a community café and a number of creative and social enterprises.

We are working with Justin and local experts to restore and repair the 3,500ft² Ballroom meaning that this important community asset will reopen for the first time in over 50 years.

The Ballroom will be a community arts venue where Restoke and the people of Stoke-on-Trent can dream-up and journey through creative adventures together.

We hope the Ballroom will be open by summer 2021.



“With their great track record of community outreach and delivery Restoke are the perfect organisation to spearhead the restoration of this incredible asset as a key part of the ongoing regeneration of Fenton Town.”

- Justin Meath Baker, Building Owner

“Can’t tell you how excited I am to have you based right here in Fenton. Looking forward to Restoke fabulousness.”

- Participant & Fenton Resident

Other Happenings in 2020

In 2020 we delivered creative workshops and guest talks for:

Trinity-Laban Conservatoire for Dance & Music – Community Dance

Terrestrial – Remote Artist Residencies

Staffordshire University – Clinical Psychology

Staffordshire University – Fine Art

Keele University Business School – Workforce Wellbeing Seminar

Other Projects

Before lockdown Clare was working with Verity Standen, providing movement direction for the re-staging of 'Undersong' - due to be touring throughout 2020.

Paul has been working with Tim Casson (Casson and Friends) on his interactive audio game 'Preppers'. This will be developed into a live performance in 2021.

Total Engagement in 2020

86
Workshops

161
Participants

4.4K
Audience Members

HUGE Thanks to our funders this year...



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