

**HIDDEN  
SPIRE** 2015

# BEFORE THE TEMPEST

## Evaluation

by Liz Firth and Anne Pirie, December 2015



**Arts** at the **OLD FIRE STATION**

**crisis**

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# Table of contents

1. Evaluation methods	p1
2. Background	p2
3. <i>Before the Tempest</i>	p2
4. Impact on participants	p6
5. How good was the show?	p13
6. Discussion	p16
Thanks	p18

Throughout this evaluation homeless people who are members of Crisis Skylight and are working with Arts at the Old Fire Station (AOFS) on Hidden Spire are referred to as 'members'.

## 1. Evaluation methods

Hidden Spire 2015 was a long and complex process, and methods used for evaluation were varied and involved many people.

**Pre and post questionnaires** were developed to collect basic data from homeless people on the outcomes of their engagement. However, logistical and other challenges meant that coverage was too partial to add much value to this analysis, which relies largely on the face to face interviews, described below. A small number of member case studies were prepared by Crisis staff to capture the experience of some members.

**Cast and crew before and after feedback** - all professional and non-professional members of the cast and crew were asked to complete before and after questionnaires looking at what they expected and what they got out of participating.

**Artists' reflections** were written by those artists most involved, which discussed member participation, artistic process, personal and professional development, and timing and management of the project.

**A participant observation study** of the writing phase of the project was carried out by Rosa Cisneros of Coventry University as part of a broader study entitled Civic Epistemologies. Notes from these observations were offered to the project as an in kind contribution.

An **audience survey** of 90 people was conducted immediately after the show alongside surveys of industry peers and those involved in creating the project based on the Manchester Metric (Knell 2013).

**A feedback meeting** took place open to all those involved in the project one week after the show and a **learning event** was held two months later which was attended by people who had participated in Hidden Spire as artists (homeless or otherwise), audience members or staff; participants discussed what they got out of Hidden Spire personally and professionally, and how Hidden Spire could be improved or developed. In addition to group feedback, participants discussed their responses with a partner, and recorded them on cards which were written up by staff.

Semi-structured **interviews** were carried out by Liz Firth and Anne Pirie, with 9 Crisis members, as well as Crisis and AOFS staff. Open ended questions were asked, aiming to elicit interviewees' own responses without constraining them by e.g. detailed questions about outcomes. This resulted in rich personal detail on responses to the Hidden Spire process. Comments on impact of the project thus represent the unsolicited views of participants in their own words.

This final report has been generated from all of these sources, and aims to represent the views and responses of this wide range of evaluation participants, and present reflective discussion and recommendations based on this.



Hidden Spire set-building session

## 2. Background

AOFS' major arts project with members – and the flagship arts production for the partnership with Crisis Skylight – is Hidden Spire, a theatre piece devised and performed by members alongside a professional creative team. The process is assisted by tutors, volunteers and staff from both Crisis and AOFS. *Everything from set design to front of house to the actual performance is a joint venture between homeless people, staff from the two organisations, professional artists and volunteers.*

First produced in December 2012 on a shoestring budget and performed over 4 sell out nights to the public, Hidden Spire was selected for Arts Council England funding in 2013.

AOFS and Crisis Skylight have adopted a learning approach to Hidden Spire from the outset. The evaluation report from 2012 highlighted both the power and potential of the work and the challenges for everyone involved – all of which went to inform practice in 2013. For AOFS, Hidden Spire 'is not just a production; it is a process which we hope will continue for years to come... It is an event which is designed to stir, enchant, amuse and intrigue. It demonstrates the value and the potential of having a public art centre and resources for homeless people in the same building. And importantly it shows that excellent art and inclusive art can be the same thing.'

*It is inspiring to have the chance to keep evolving this project. Initially we were really creating something in the dark and putting together a project from scratch. This year I could build on that knowledge and experience alongside a full professional team who could support me as I pushed us all further. As a result I feel I was able to push my own capabilities and create a show that I am proud of. I have also been tested further – more team to manage, a smaller cast with much bigger mental health needs, a more ambitious show, has motivated me to continue with this type of work. (Hidden Spire Director 2013)*

Arts Council England then supported the third iteration of Hidden Spire with additional support from Oxford City Council and other supporters (see below).

*Hidden Spire 2015 has been the most...rewarding of all the three projects...it felt like a huge privilege to*

*have a third year directing the project and a reward for all our hard work on the first two years. We could use that previous experience to create a project that ultimately worked really well. I am proud of the show we created, and the individual achievements of all of the creative team and all the members involved in the process. The casting enabled us to make the most of people's own characters and strengths, enabling them to shine. The resulting piece was funny and touching, with colourful moments as well as exploring quite significant universal themes. (Hidden Spire Director 2015)*

## 3. Before the Tempest

*"...where everyone was equal, and no-one thought themselves more important than anyone else, and where people were kind and generous when they saw someone in trouble..."*

- From *Before the Tempest*, Renata Allen

Hidden Spire 2015 *Before the Tempest* imagined what life was like on the island for Miranda and Prospero as a prequel to Shakespeare's classic tale. A chorus of birds are Miranda and Prospero's companions on the island, telling stories of distant lands.

Themes of transformation and adventure, loneliness and being trapped, love and hope were explored.



*Shakespeare's play opens with a monumental storm conjured by Prospero in order to seek revenge and instigate change on the island, but what led to this pivotal moment?... [We explored] our hopes and dreams for the future through exploring things – both physical objects and abstract ideas – and this is what Miranda and Prospero are doing in our tale. They are both searching for their place in the world.*  
(Hidden Spire Director)

The project was created through professional artists working with members to create and show work to the public using music, dance, theatre and visual arts. Everything from set design, script-writing and front-of-house was done as a collaboration between the artists and members, and process and final product were given equal priority. The aim was to show that excellent art and inclusive art can be the same thing – and that participation touches and enriches everyone involved.

*It is the many different voices woven together that make the fabric of this piece and it is this enriching process which continues to challenge and reward all of us who work on the project.* (Hidden Spire Director)

## The process

Hidden Spire was a 14-month long process led by director Lizzy McBain that involved mobilising 29 artists, 55 members, and many AOFS and Crisis staff. The play was developed over this time through a complex process of group work with members, sharing ideas and results between artists and disciplines, and responding to the work carried out by others. At times, professional artists would take the multivocal ideas and images developed in workshops and push their part of the project forward working as an individual (through e.g. developing a synopsis of the play based on creative writing workshops); then the process would again be opened up to both members and the wider multidisciplinary team of artists to respond to, develop, and particularise. A professional development day was planned for January 2015, called 'Mash Up', to help bring the creative team together which had to be cancelled because of the unavailability of those booked to lead it. Extra meetings were then scheduled to try and maintain strong communication.

*The depth behind the work seemed to come through in performance - the depth of research and time spent developing the project through its different phases and iterations - it felt distilled, sharper and more particular in the final performance.* (Peer reviewer)

*What I loved about the show, script and set and performances was that it had so many layers to it...you captured so many layers in what you did...it was just so rich and deep and multi-faceted.* (Audience member)

*One of the benefits of working on Hidden Spire from the outset has been a long incubation period for our ideas, and the opportunity to get very involved with the material coming from writing and devising sessions.* (Professional artist)

## Summer 2014 – Transforming the ordinary

The Hidden Spire process began with a research and development 'summer school' in 2014. Professional artists led research and development workshops with members on creative writing (1 week; Renata Allen) and visual arts (2 weeks; Rachel Barbaresi and Emma Reynard); work was shared between the visual and written processes, with participants responding to each other's work.

*We told stories about places; places that meant a lot to us, our own space in the wilderness, tales of the sea, adventures in arctic landscapes, and dreams of our perfect land. We gathered all sorts of materials, made dens, wrapped beautiful glass bottles with very fine thread, created projection slides with filaments of fabric and dripped ink, and model landscapes filled with surreal objects.* (Hidden Spire Director)

*It was great to have the time to experiment at the start of the project, and I think the concept of having the theme of Transforming the Ordinary worked well. Having this time to experiment gave us the space to make the work unique and also sparked interest and built confidence with the members.* (Professional artist)

*Three of the writers had made visual pieces and showed us their work...and from this point the two creative processes began to merge. The writing group wrote in response to the Art they saw and many of*



Transforming The Ordinary session

*them then went on to create more visual pieces with the Artists in the weeks following. (Professional artist)*

Based on the work done by members in the research and development phase, writer Renata Allen created an outline structure and concept for the play as a prequel to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

### Autumn 2014 – Open Doors – Sharing work in progress

Work created in both the writing and visual art processes was presented in the theatre at the Old Fire Station over the weekend of Oxford's Open Doors event when buildings across the city open their doors to the public. Members of the public were able to view an installation of light projections and sculptures accompanied by recordings of members reading work they had written.



Devising day, spring 2015

### Winter 2014 to Spring 2015 – Designing and devising the play

Script Writing, Devising and Design workshops were led by professional artists, working as a team with members to create the play synopsis, source material, and solve the practical problems of devising a play.

*These sessions allowed us to hone in on the characters, find a way to express the comic troupe of commedia birds that we decided also inhabited the island and play with stories that Prospero and Miranda might tell each other to pass the time. (Professional artist)*

*In workshops, we explored the inner lives of various birds, from seagulls to woodpeckers, and experimented with different ways of forming the distinctive silhouette of wings and tails in clothes. Facts about their behaviour and habitat fed into the expression of each distinct personality, so that the line between bird and human is blurred. (Professional artist)*

*I think that the process of working alongside the script writing course was successful. It was an interesting process working with the visuals and then this getting passed onto the writing workshops, then back to the visual arts again. I think this made the final work stronger as a whole. (Professional artist)*

Development of the script – Renata Allen, working with some of the member writers and a student on placement from Ruskin College Writing for Performance Course, wrote a first draft of the play.

### Summer 2015 – Making the play

A period of intense activity began in the summer to create the final script, set, music and movement. These included set building, costume making, drama, movement and music workshops.

A rehearsed reading of part of the play was presented to over 60 homeless people as part of a Crisis celebration.

Gallery exhibition – multimedia artist Nicola Armitage created a film and exhibition that explored the process of creating *Before the Tempest* and included maquettes created by members and film of rehearsals. The exhibition was open to the public from 14th August to 26th September in the Old Fire Station art gallery. This included a public workshop as part of the Big Draw and Fun Palaces called 'Conjure your drawings to life using the magic of technology.'

### Autumn 2015 – Delivering the play

Two frenetic weeks of full time rehearsal were held in which professional and non professional actors, lighting, stage managers and set builders learned lines, adjusted and assembled the set, finalised costumes and prepared for opening.

*It is the excitement of rehearsals as we all come together and create a company in September that I am really looking forward to. When titles and individual backgrounds disappear and we all embark on a mission to create a performance together. (Hidden Spire Director)*

This was followed by 4 performances of the show over 3 days in September (with professional actors Steve Dineen, Tanner Efinger and Abi Hood), and a question and answer session with the audience. These were filmed and are available on the Hidden Spire website ([www.hiddenspire.co.uk](http://www.hiddenspire.co.uk)), along with Nicola Armitage's behind the scenes film.

Activity name	Start date	End date	No. sessions
Art Project - Summer School	04-Aug-14	29-Aug-14	18
Creative Writing - Summer School	18-Aug-14	22-Aug-14	10
Open Doors - sharing	13-Sept-14	13-Sept-14	2
Write a Script + Make a Play	15-Jan-15	05-Mar-15	20
Design Workshop	08-May-15	22-May-15	6
Celebration event	15-Jul-15	15-Jul-15	2
Open drama and music workshop	20-Jul-15	20-Jul-15	2
Set building workshop	21-Jul-15	24-Jul-15	8
Set dressing and costume making workshop	03-Aug-15	24-Aug-15	4
Theatre & Movement Workshop	04-Aug-15	25-Aug-15	4
Rehearsals	7-Sept-15	17-Sept-15	18
Performances	17-Sept-15	19-Sept-15	4
Feedback meeting	25-Sept-15	25-Sept-15	1
Learning event	25-Nov-15	25-Nov-15	1
<b>WHOLE PROJECT</b>	<b>04-Aug-14</b>	<b>25-Nov-15</b>	<b>100</b>

A session is all or part of a morning, afternoon or evening.

After the show, in October 2015, 23 of the team (including 9 members) went to see Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as guests of Oxford Playhouse.

## Reflections

The logistics of developing and delivering Hidden Spire, alongside a full programme of events and exhibitions for AOFS and a busy educational and support programme at Crisis, is always a challenge. And this was the most ambitious programme to date, extending over 14 months and involving a complex multidisciplinary team of professional artists and more than 50 members. However, both AOFS and Crisis identified it as 'the best yet' in terms of their partnership. Crisis participation was identified by many as very committed, and crucial, and the new arrangement of having one Progression Coach attached to the project to provide continuity was very successful.

*It is still an intense process and will always have some challenges....there were 'some tiny things that should have been planned earlier but overall it's worked well' (Crisis Skylight staff member)*

*The thing that struck me was the importance of the building and the collaboration between Crisis and AOFS which was able to support people through this process in a safe way. (from learning event)*

*The Crisis Progression team [made a] phenomenal contribution to the show. Every time we needed anything there has been someone there to help us. I was worried before we started rehearsals about working with Crisis members. I think my worries were about a third about what they would be like and about two-thirds that I would do something terribly wrong and upset someone! (Professional artist)*

Most welcomed the extended development period, seeing it as essential to collaborative creation between members and professionals and supporting valuable conversations between disciplines

*Having a project expand from roughly 5 months [for the first Hidden Spire in 2012] to 14 months, gave us proper time to process thoughts and develop the piece, rather than working in a reactive way – especially time to work with the writer on developing our ideas over a longer term conversation. (Hidden Spire Director)*



Before *The Tempest* rehearsal

Although some felt it was difficult to maintain a sense of momentum in the less intensive parts of the process  
*It is hard to build on the work you are doing in a weekly class – meeting more regularly over a shorter time would have been more creatively satisfying for everyone. (Professional artist)*

Professionals who had not been involved in Hidden Spire before reflected on the additional time demands of this kind of process

*I think at the start of the project, I wish I would have been more aware of the amount of work which was going to be involved with the whole project. I just found that a lot of my time was being taken up with emails, admin, meetings etc. when I wasn't expecting it from the start. (Professional artist)*



## Depth of engagement

55 members attended at least one of the 100 Hidden Spire sessions over the 14 months. Sessions were intensive and involved working as a team with other artists - members and professionals alike.

17 (31%) of these members were very engaged in the project, either through in depth involvement in one programme (such as a 5-day writing workshop), or across one of the phases (such as across summer 2015 in the research and development phase), or across the entire project. 10 of these (18%) were the most deeply engaged members, and attended 22-60 sessions.

8 (15%) members were less engaged, but still attended 10-20 sessions. 30 members (54%) attended 2-8 sessions and were less deeply involved in the project. We do not have quantitative data on why these members were not more fully involved, but the pattern of attendance for some may indicate

that either they are recent arrivals at Crisis (those involved only in summer 2015; 13 members), or that they have moved on from attending Crisis (those involved only in the early phases of the project; 4 members). Interviews with members suggest that other reasons for choosing to be less involved include alternative commitments like getting a job or personal circumstances such as ill health. One member who had been deeply engaged in the earlier stages died.

31 (56%) of those involved had not previously been involved in AOFS arts, training or volunteering before attending Hidden Spire events.

## Equalities

12% identified as Black, mixed race or other (compared to 27% across all Oxford Crisis Skylight members). 32% of all those involved are women (compared to 24% across all Oxford Crisis Skylight members), and 41% of all female attendances happened in the earliest part of the project (summer 2014). By summer/autumn 2015, only 20% of attendances were by women. 5 (29%) of the deeply engaged members were women.

## Audience numbers

400 people saw *Before the Tempest*; 25 people attended the private view of the exhibition and 5,663 people were counted as having passed through the exhibition; 35 people attended the Big Draw workshop; 8 members attended a talk about the exhibition. 105 people saw a sharing of work in progress in September 2014 and 4,017 users followed the Hidden Spire blog over the lifetime of the project.

## 4. Impact on participants

AOFS has a theory of change approach to measuring its impact. At the heart of this theory of change is a conviction that:

*Seeing, participating in and making art engages, excites and stretches people, encouraging new voices and*

unexpected connections. As an arts centre, sharing a building and working in partnership with Crisis, we want to deliver and sustain a truly inclusive artistic and cultural public space.....We believe that the mix of people, activities and opportunities within AOFS – and the values that underpin everything we do – enable people to find their own ways to become better artists, more resilient individuals and part of stronger, more inclusive communities. (AOFS Theory of Change, January 2015)

While encouraging an environment where people find their own outcomes, AOFS sets out to help achieve the following three key outcomes:

- Everyone engaged with AOFS is more open to new ideas and different people
- Artists are more successful
- Homeless people are more resilient and stable

The headings in this section reflect the indicators that AOFS had chosen to measure progress towards these three outcomes.

## Participate and have fun

AOFS sees enabling many different people to participate and have fun together as an essential part of its change agenda because it believes that:

- Positive feelings support positive lives
- Experimenting, enjoying and learning together makes us all stronger, happier and more open to others
- Homeless people need opportunities to focus on their strengths and interests not their problems

Hidden Spire participants – professional and non-professional alike – commented on how much fun was had – and that this was not trivial, but important and life changing.

*One of the most positive experiences I've had in recent years.....There's a passion inside me and there was no where to put it – but Hidden Spire came along and that's where I could put it. (Member)*

*It is possible to get a bit jaded/tired when working in the theatre and to forget the sheer joy of creating something together out of nothing. The best theatre experience I can remember.... I've never felt so much joy at a finished product. (Professional artist)*

*I liked making people laugh – it's one of the things I like about myself. (Member)*

And Crisis staff commented on the importance of having fun and being happy – welcoming the fact that *Before the Tempest* drew on members' experience and imagination to create a positive and empowering story.

*(Members) have hidden within them the capacity for joy – and there aren't many places where they can really let that go. It's scientifically proven that laughter is good for you. We work with people about not getting stuck in their story - it's great if Hidden Spire is one of those moments that people will look back on and smile – that's really good for our members. (Crisis Skylight staff)*

We've seen above that many members participated in Hidden Spire, in different ways and at different levels. A key part of all the activities across the 14 month project was flexibility - enabling members to participate in as many or as few sessions as they wanted, and to participate within those sessions in whatever manner felt right to them. This pragmatic response to the sometimes chaotic and unpredictable lives members are leading, the conflicting demands on their time, and the different priorities or paths members were following meant that people with a wide range of interests, needs and ambitions were able to take part.

*It's important to remember how much is going on in members' lives. It's good to see people on a weekly basis but it's important that they can come in, get involved and move on when they have got what they need from it. (Member)*

*You come [to AOFS] and they say 'yes, you may have depression or other problems but you can still do things – just do them at your own pace'. (Member)*

This led to a member of staff reflecting on how some members took to Hidden Spire when they had not been





motivated to the same degree by other AOFS work.

*People just need the right context in which to shine. (AOFS staff member)*

And another member of staff commented on how members used the process in different ways.

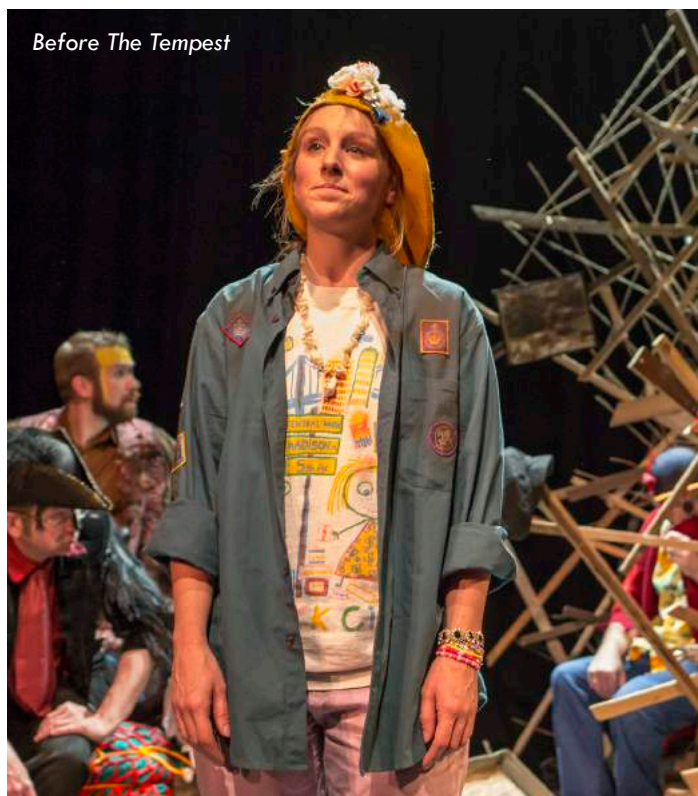
*Some use it as a natural move on point – and some have increased the level of their engagement and as a result want to go onto, for example, AOFS’ Arts Training Scheme. (Crisis Skylight staff)*

Creating situations which push people’s boundaries is not without its risks. Great care is taken to make sure that everyone involved in Hidden Spire feels safe and appropriately supported. But there were times when members found themselves participating in exercises or situations that they would have stepped away from had they understood them better in advance. Sometimes this challenge was empowering.

*I didn’t really know what it involved and was completely unprepared....but I got really good feedback from people on it. And having done it once, I wouldn’t be worried about it in the future...So initially it was very stressful but afterwards I realised that I would not have had the elation of sticking with my anxiety in that situation and having conquered it. (Member)*

On others, they felt pushed too far beyond their comfort zone – although it is clear that other participants were quick to put things right once they realised there were problems.

*People did get it in the end so it was sorted out but if I had known what the exercise was, I would have taken myself out of it – but once I was in it I did not feel able to leave.... although it would have been OK with everyone if I’d said at the start ‘I really don’t want to do this – this is beyond my ability to cope with’. (Member)*



### Expand cultural and artistic horizons

AOFS aims to expand the cultural/artistic horizons of audiences, artists and members alike. It believes that:

- Exposure to interesting, high quality new work stimulates new thinking and different ways of engaging
- Exposure to work created by and with marginalised people challenges stereotypes
- Seeing ‘people like me’ as artists builds confidence and hope
- Engaging with the arts within AOFS opens doors for other artistic opportunities

Participants clearly found their horizons stretched.

*Because of being involved in Hidden Spire, I ended up going to the Playhouse to see The Tempest – that was my first piece of Shakespeare. And understanding more about what was going on behind the scenes and really understanding this process added to my enjoyment. (Member)*

*I have started to look at theatre and drama differently, knowing what goes on to make it and how it’s written. (Member)*  
*I think differently about social theatre – its purpose, outcomes and potential. (Professional artist)*

And the quality of the work meant it was both enjoyed for what it was, rather than simply for what it did for participants. This challenged perceptions and stereotypes.

*As a piece of art it stands on its own, unsupported by caveats of “considering” and “despite”. By any standards, it’s a bloody good show. (Professional artist)*

*Thank you for creating such a wonderful piece of theatre with a wonderful cast. All were thoroughly engaging and the mix of experience even made it more real for me. The set was remarkable, it took the show to another level. It was amazing to see the players within such a beautiful sculpture that added magic and sophistication to the overall vision. (Audience member)*

*I particularly appreciated the costumes, and of course the quality of performance - and maybe most of all, the imagination that led to the stories. (Audience member)*

## Increase creative ability and confidence

AOFS believes that increasing creative ability and confidence can be transformational because

- developing a voice as an artist is powerful
- people who face disadvantage and are marginalised in society are too often denied a voice as artists
- a stimulating and supportive environment enables emerging artists to grow and share their ideas
- the mix of people engaging with AOFS is itself stimulating and supports better art

Hidden Spire was seen as a transformative experience by members.

*It was really powerful hearing the words I'd written performed on the stage. (Member)*

*Best thing about this? Getting my mind to work creatively. (Member)*

*The experience of going onstage and giving voice to that script that you've contributed to, in front of 100 people, was amazing. (Member)*

And members have since carried on with creative activities independently, aiming higher than they would have before.

*I have been working on my portfolio to apply to the creative writing course at Ruskin – putting in 5 hours a day for about 6 weeks to get it ready. (Member)*

*After Hidden Spire, I wrote a 15-minute 2-man play, a black comedy about a carer and a client, with one of the Hidden Spire member actors as the main character. (Member)*

All participants were regularly thanked, their work acknowledged, and real efforts to include the many images, ideas and voices generated by those who took part in all stages of the project were made. This contributed to a feeling of accomplishment and being valued within the project.

And professional artists often commented on learning from the non-professionals.

*I was inspired by the enthusiasm of the members towards the project. Everybody involved took on their own individual way of working, and created lots of work which were like little experiments or 'samples'. The project allowed time for these ideas to be developed, which allowed the members to be more creative and see what worked and what didn't. (Professional artist)*

*They have "created" those roles by putting themselves and their personalities into the characters freely and generously. It's a lesson in clarity for most of us. (Professional artist)*

*From watching the Crisis members - seeing them put themselves on the line and embrace the unknown - I have realised that I should not let fear hold me back in life and I should be more like them and just go for things. (Professional artist)*

## New skills

AOFS aims to support both artists and homeless people in developing artistic and other skills that builds their confidence, employment prospects and life choices.

The aim to create good work that stands on its own merits means that the bar is high in all aspects of Hidden Spire work – and all concerned found that working together to achieve this was a learning process.

*They warn you it is going to be hard and draining. (Member)*

*I'm usually impatient. It wasn't a quick process, I had to work in a different way. It has influenced my professional work. (Professional artist)*



The approach to teamwork and support was often

commented on as unusual – most of the artists reported learning from this approach and valuing it.

*A different way of acting. A true ensemble. Here nurturing and supporting others to even be there on the night was the most important thing, and not a more insular, possibly selfish approach, where everyone does 'their job'. (Professional artist)*

*Good, open, supportive practice. Really startlingly nice to have that level of involvement. (Professional artist)*  
*I have never been involved in a creative project that involves so many people and disciplines. This has been both interesting and challenging. Interesting as I can see parallel ideas being developed in different disciplines which is really inspiring. Challenging as we all work in different ways and need to communicate closely to understand each other. (Professional artist)*

And members spoke about the skills and confidence they would take away from Hidden Spire into their search for jobs, homes and new opportunities

*I've been volunteering full time for 2 weeks – which gives me the confidence that I do have the resilience to commit to full time work for a short time where it is something I can put all my passion into. And this gives me confidence that I will be able to do part-time work. (Member)*

*It's taken lots of different steps to make it possible for me to be ready to apply for a course... Now I want to set some goals for this year to work towards. (Member)*



Before The Tempest

## New identities

Part of AOFS' aim is to help participants experiment with new identities – for example, to move away from seeing themselves primarily as service receivers, to seeing themselves as service providers – from accepting a label of 'homeless person' to trying on new identities as 'actor' or 'stage manager'.

This subtle concept can be difficult to measure in evaluation, but several participants spoke of identities – and it may be that the activity of acting, in particular, helps people to develop skills in trying on new identities.

*I like the idea of being an actor...being able to fulfil someone's ideas, to be believable in a role... every pigeon is slightly different. They are quite confident – they come up to you even though you could easily squish them. Confident and good looking. (Member)*

*The hardest bit? People think I'm quite quiet in real life. But in acting and writing, my subconscious comes out. My outside, polite veneer cracks. We're all actors playing parts in daily life, showing different sides of ourselves. (Member)*

*X changed over the course of Hidden Spire – how he interacted at reception, the professionalization of his behaviour. He had more confidence, he interacted more. His body language – bigger gestures, how he walked, taking up more space. He came into the building in the same way as the actors. (AOFS staff)*

Participation in Hidden Spire has helped a number of members to see themselves as artists and as people with something to contribute to the arts. Members have gone on to apply for employment, volunteering or arts projects in other organisations following participation in Hidden Spire.

*I've just put in an application to the New Theatre for casual back stage work. (Member)*

*I'm doing a class at Pegasus, and we're putting something on in February. I'm writing for that. (Member)*

*Ideally I would like to work in this field. I like to think that I'm quite ambitious, but I don't know if I am. Perhaps someday I might see Broadway. (Member)*

Identities are crucial in wider society. Members sometimes spoke of the difficulties they have encountered, when other people's perceptions of them stop them from taking up new identities.

*I applied to go to a new arts centre but they turned me down when I told them I had a criminal record – here [at AOFS] they don't even ask about your past, which is amazing. They don't judge you on your past – they just care about who you are now. (Member)*

## Appreciate diversity

AOFS sees a commitment to diversity as a driver for positive change – in attitudes to marginalised people, in genuine relationships growing from common tasks and in stimulating and supporting better art.

Participants often spoke of how diverse the group was, the value they drew from this individually and how it contributed to the quality of the project.

*It was a diverse group of people, all so different. Putting them all together makes a colourful spectrum, a snapshot of life. Such different backgrounds – that really contributed to it. (Member)*

*The best thing about it was meeting the professionals – I like watching people with experience do their job – taking in all the information that you can. And working with a diverse range of people...Hidden Spire made me realise the talents other members have. (Member)*

*The ideas that the Crisis members brought to the table - these often offered a new way of looking at things and inspired our thoughts/discussions/improvisations to take unexpected directions. Their ideas often led to thinking outside the box which is always exciting. (Professional artist)*

Although not all the relationships were easy, and this tested both participants' ability to get on with people who were being quite difficult, and the limits and strengths of the process of working together.

*X could be really annoying – but it wouldn't have been the same without him. (Member)*

*X presented various difficulties for the team in terms of ability to understand instructions and interpret when certain behaviours are appropriate. However, working with Crisis, we were able to keep him on board, and address concerns where possible, and I believe he gained a huge amount of confidence. It is down to the flexibility of our process and the structure of the script that we were able to cast him in a role that drew on his strengths and the final piece was rewarded as a result. (Hidden Spire Director)*

Many artists commented that the safe and supportive atmosphere contributed to a trust between all participants that enabled commitment and honesty in the artistic work that was done – and that unexpected artistic outcomes came about as a result.

*I think this is one of the most valuable and rich theatrical experiences I have had. It required us all to develop a trust far deeper than in any ordinary acting company as we are all from such vastly different backgrounds, levels of theatrical experience and ways we experience and move through life. (Professional artist)*

*Due to the safe environment that Lizzy created, improvisations/exercises were permitted to extend beyond their remit and thus unexpected discoveries were made. (Professional artist)*

## Networks and collaboration

At the heart of AOFS is a commitment to positive community and networks that give people greater resources to define their own futures. Nearly every participant who provided feedback commented on the importance and quality of the team work on the project. The development of relationships is an important part of AOFS' aims, and feeds into helping members develop networks outside of homelessness, strengthening all professional and non professional artists' networks, and strengthening participants' skills in collaboration and working with others.

*The arts is a bridge into a different community – not for everyone but for a lot of people. (Crisis Skylight staff)*

Participants commented on how Hidden Spire was truly a group effort.

*It was very open and inclusive – a genuinely collaborative thing. It didn't matter who you were – it was a level playing field. (Member)*

*It was a group effort – when people said how good it was, they meant the whole ensemble, the totality of it. (Member)*

*On the first few days of the project, there was an unspoken line that divided the professionals from the Crisis members. But as the days passed away, and we worked closely together to create 'Before the Tempest', that line gradually disappeared. It didn't feel like 'us' and 'them'. It was very simply "the cast". (Professional artist)*

Members commented on how they felt part of something, and how valuable that was for them.

*Being part of the team and having a place in it and having trust put in me was very satisfying. (Member)*

*It made me feel like I belonged to something. It gave me self-worth. It made me realise people depended on me. (Member)*

*The inclusiveness really worked – and the collaboration. Members were made to feel significant and it was*



important to be there. They wanted to continue to do it – and their self-esteem goes up and up. Standing on stage and realising 'here I am, I can do this' is brilliantly empowering. (Member)

And Crisis staff agreed that this was an unusual and valuable experience for members.

*It's an incredibly powerful process for our members and hard to imagine where else they could have the opportunity to play such an important part in something and feel so valued. (Crisis Skylight staff)*

Artists also feel that the collaborative approach was valuable artistically and personally.

*I see people from the first Hidden Spire and there is still a strong connection, a shared experience. (Professional artist)*

*It was also great to see people working together as a team and individually. I enjoyed working as a professional artist amongst the Crisis members, it had a great atmosphere....we were all part of the same team working together, rather than in a teacher/student role. (Professional artist)*

*It created a new opportunity to work in a really big team creating a piece reflecting many perspectives and visions. Highly collaborative and that is unusual for a writer. As a newbie to Oxford it has helped me meet many artists and fellow theatre practitioners and I feel it has created a real sense of network amongst us all. I feel connected to the Old Fire Station now and enjoy being here as if I belong and know people. (Professional artist)*

And all members of the team – professional and non-professional - took on supportive roles, helping each other through difficult bits.

*I was aware that we had created something that would be unique in its form every time we performed it. I knew that it was this element - the fact that our creation was very much alive and responsive to outside factors - that made it special but also knew that this meant we had to really listen, be totally in the moment and have an even keener trust than usual. We needed to be able to save each other should it be necessary. The reward for this was the fascinating and nuanced performances that people were able to give. (Professional artist)*

A sense of wider social responsibility was engendered that has, for some, carried on.

*Doing a bit of ushering over the busy Christmas period seems like a good thing to do. It's not an area that I want to work in but the social aspect of it is good... it's another opportunity to show my thanks for the opportunities I have had. Since Hidden Spire, my attitude to volunteering has changed, it's not all about what is good for me and my job prospects. I want to make a contribution. (Member)*



Hidden Spire costume design sketch

## Resilience

AOFS seeks to have impact for people long after the show is over, aiming to help all people involved with their work to feel more confident and valued, to be able to bounce back under adversity, and to be hopeful. All participants, especially members, commented on Hidden Spire's impact on confidence, self image, courage, hope and feelings of safety.

*I felt like I had self-worth, that someone wanted me. (Member)*

*Facing an audience exposes you to risk both individually and collectively, makes a person more brave. (Member)*

*Regardless of how far from their comfort zone members may have felt, many of them just 'went for it'. This, in turn, inspired us (the trained actors) to have greater bravery and to take more risks. (Professional artist)*

*Hidden Spire helped me to accept criticism because I felt safe. (Member)*

*Coming here gave me hope and a purpose – it empowers people who've been disempowered. If this place wasn't here, I wouldn't be here or I would be into crime. (Member)*

*A confidence boost in acting – I'm not afraid to make a fool of myself now – just go for it. (Member)*

*Originally I was edgy about whether...I and also the members were capable of undertaking such large and complex parts in such a compressed time. My confidence in such a project now would be a 5 out of 5 - there seems to be very little that can't be achieved given the right people and the right framework and the right support. (Professional artist)*

## 5. How good was the show?

A survey based on the Manchester Metric (Knell 2013) was used to assess what the hopes of a sample of those involved in producing the show were before the show ('self' in the analysis), and a sample of 'peer' individuals/organisations' expectations, also before the show. These peers were then asked what their perceptions of the show were after seeing it, and a sample of the audience were asked about their perceptions of the show.

Questions asked	Audience	Peers	Self
Presentation: it was well produced and presented	✓	✓	✓
Distinctiveness: it was different from things I've experienced before	✓	✓	✓
Rigour: it was well thought through and put together	✓	✓	✓
Relevance: it had something to say about the world in which we live	✓	✓	✓
Challenge: it was thought-provoking	✓	✓	✓
Captivation: it was absorbing and held my attention	✓	✓	✓
Meaning: it meant something to me personally	✓	✓	✓
Enthusiasm: I would come to something like this again	✓	✓	✓
Local impact: it is important that it's happening here	✓	✓	✓
Concept: it was an interesting idea/programme		✓	✓
Risk: the artists/curators really challenged themselves with this work		✓	✓
Originality: it was ground-breaking		✓	✓
Excellence (national): it is amongst the best of its type in the UK		✓	✓
Excellence (global): it is amongst the best of its type in the world		✓	✓

4 people involved in producing the show (including 1 AOFS staff, 2 artists and 1 member) were surveyed. Results showed that participants had fairly high hopes for many aspects of the show, including challenge, captivation, local impact, concept, distinctiveness, meaning, rigour, risk and relevance (all given an average of 7-8.75), but were somewhat less confident about presentation, and noticeably less confidence about originality, national and global excellence. This reflects the aims of the project, which, while emphasising quality of product, did not aim to have e.g. international excellence. The overall average score was 7. However, score levels were quite variable for national excellence, risk and originality, with one scorer rating these significantly lower than the others.

	Self - pre	Peers - pre	Peers - post	Audience - post
<b>Presentation</b>	6.75	4.8	8.5	9.22
<b>Distinctiveness</b>	7.5	5.4	8	8.59
<b>Rigour</b>	7.5	4.4	8.25	9.07
<b>Relevance</b>	7.5	5.8	8	8.73
<b>Challenge</b>	8	5.8	8.25	8.41
<b>Captivation</b>	8	4.6	8.5	9.11
<b>Meaning</b>	7.5	5.2	7.5	8.08
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	8	5.6	8.75	9.47
<b>Local impact</b>	8.75	5.6	8.25	9.36
<b>Concept</b>	8.5	6	8.75	
<b>Risk</b>	7.25	5.4	9.25	
<b>Originality</b>	5.25	4.4	8	
<b>Excellence (national)</b>	4.25	4	7	
<b>Excellence (global)</b>	2.75	3.4	6.75	
<b>Total average</b>	7	5.03	8.13	8.89

A sample of 6 peers (professionals working in the arts and in homelessness) were asked to review the play before and after seeing it. Unfortunately, only 3 of the reviewers completed both before and after questionnaires (5 completed 'pre' and 4 completed 'post'). However, results were intriguing. The 'pre' questionnaires showed that reviewers did not have very high expectations of the show, with the average being 5.03, and the highest score being 6 for concept. However, the scores given for distinctiveness, rigour and relevance were quite variable. One arts and one homelessness professional gave consistently relatively low scores on these aspects, while some of the other reviewers gave a 9 or 10 for these aspects.



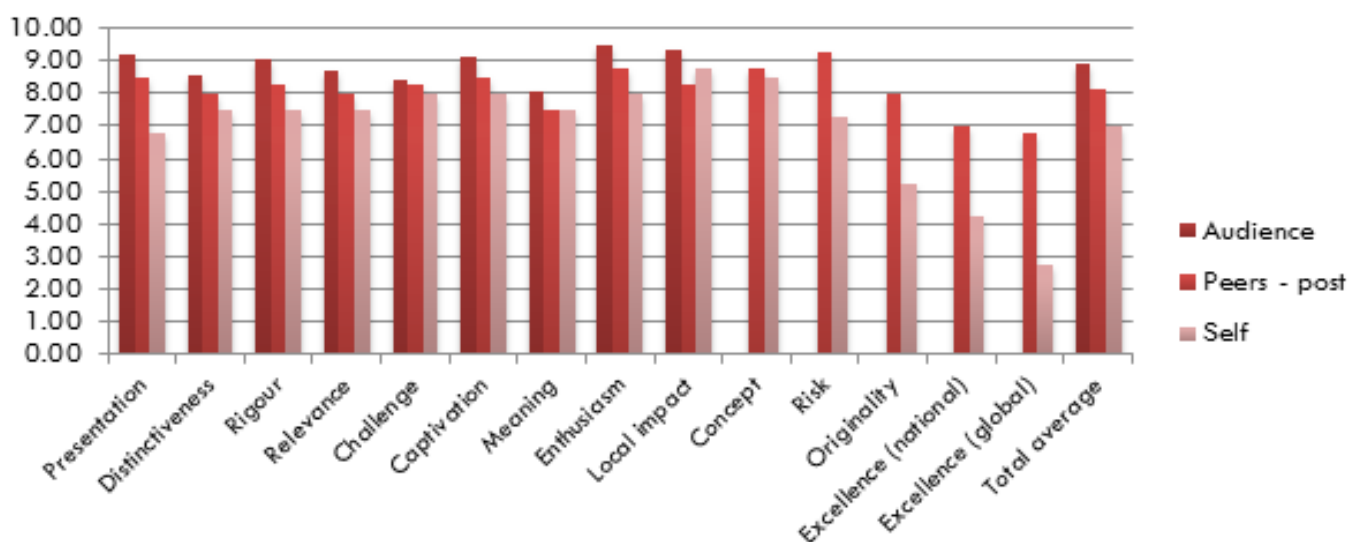
After the show, there was a significant change in the level of reviewers' scores. The average peer score went up to 8.13 (a 62% improvement). The average score for all metrics improved, with the highest levels of improvement (over 70%) for presentation, rigour, captivation, originality, global and national excellence. All but three of the questions scored 8 or higher. The three lowest were meaning (7.5), national excellence (7) and global excellence (6.75). The two excellence scores still represent a very significant advance on the expectations of those who created the show. In fact, peers rated most of the metrics higher than 'self' had hoped for, with originality (52% higher), national excellence (65%), and global excellence (145% higher). This suggests that those closely involved with the production may have significantly underrated its artistic value in terms of originality and excellence on a wider scale.

Two areas not rated higher than self by peers were meaning, which was rated at the same level (7.5), and local impact, which was rated 5.7% lower by peers than by self. However, both were rated relatively high by self and the variation is small.

It is noticeable that peers' responses were remarkably consistent for all questions after seeing the show, except for that of global excellence – where a homelessness professional gave a low score (4), and an arts professional gave a high score (9).

One peer reviewer from Arts Council England had an average 67% improvement across all her scores after seeing the show. Her expectations before the show were the lowest of all peer reviewers (5.29), and after seeing the show, her average response was the highest of all peer reviewers (8.64).

92 audience members (representing 23% of the total audience) were surveyed on the night using a shorter suite of 9 questions. 40 responded in face to face interviews with staff, and 52 completed forms on their own. There was no significant difference between responses given in interviews and those recorded directly by respondents.





Audience members gave *Before the Tempest* high scores on all questions, with an average of 8.89 out of 10 overall. Particularly high scores were given for presentation, rigour, captivation, enthusiasm and local impact (all over 9). Audiences are reputed to give high scores on quality questionnaires for performances/art experiences, but even so this seems to reflect a very high level of satisfaction with all aspects of the performance. Comparing audience with other reviewers, the audience rated all questions more highly than either peers or self, and particularly highly on presentation, rigour, captivation, enthusiasm and local impact.

The responses given were analysed in terms of their “variability”. Variability refers to how “spread out” the answers were to a particular question. This is calculated in terms of how close the scores are to the middle of the distribution. Here, there was low variability for most of the audience answers (a score of <2 in the table below), meaning that most people agreed fairly closely with each other in the answer they gave to the question. Four questions had very slightly higher levels of variability – this suggests that for these four questions, there was somewhat more disagreement over what score should be given. These were meaning, relevance, challenge and distinctiveness.

Overall, the variability analysis shows that there was good consensus among the audience and peers (after seeing the show) on the high quality of the show.

Variability	Audience	Peers (pre)	Peers (post)	Self
Presentation	0.88	2.50	0.33	2.25
Distinctiveness	2.34	5.70	0.67	0.33
Rigour	1.18	5.20	0.92	1.67
Relevance	2.45	4.70	0.67	1.67
Challenge	2.38	3.70	0.92	1.33
Captivation	1.13	0.20	1.00	0.67
Meaning	3.39	1.70	0.33	1.67
Enthusiasm	0.95	2.80	0.25	3.33
Local impact	1.69	3.80	2.25	0.92
Concept		1.30	0.25	1.00
Risk		2.30	0.25	4.92
Originality		0.30	2.00	8.92
Excellence (national)		0.80	2.67	4.92
Excellence (global)		0.70	4.25	2.92
Average score	3.8399	1.10	0.37	
N=	92	5	4	4

0 - 2	2.1 - 4	4.1 - 6
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## 6. Discussion

Arts Council funding for Hidden Spire 2015 enabled AOFS to put into practice in earnest the learning from previous productions. This evaluation suggests that it was a considerable success, both in terms of its impact for participants and in the delivery of a high quality, popular show for a paying audience.

### Successes and questions

#### Participation and collaboration

Hidden Spire achieved a significant degree of participation and collaboration across all elements of the development – initial concept, script, design, staging and performance. Only four members stood on stage at the end of the process – but many more feel a real sense of ownership that has been harder to achieve in earlier productions. And Hidden Spire was a first point of contact for many members with AOFS' work, with many having deep engagement in the project.

A larger, multidisciplinary team of professional artists has both enabled stronger participation for members at all stages and supported stronger collaboration between the disciplines to bring members ideas to life in the final production. Supporting the show with an exhibition and a question and answer session with audience members provided important public recognition and acknowledgement to the process as a whole. And an extended development period created opportunities for others to test the water – people whose life circumstances made a long-term commitment impossible or who may not yet be ready to get more deeply involved.

Professional artists too valued an unusual opportunity to work across disciplinary boundaries in creating Hidden Spire, feed into different aspects of the whole project, and work with non-professionals who brought new experiences and attitudes to their artistic work.

And the role of Crisis was crucial in all stages of Hidden Spire. They recruited members, provided support for members involved in the project, and guidance for artists who worked with members. This project has deepened and broadened the relationship between AOFS and Crisis, with Crisis staff working in different ways with AOFS staff and artists, and with each other.

Questions arising from the evaluation are:

- Can even deeper member engagement in certain aspects of the project, such as acting, writing or stage managing, be supported?
- Can the participation of women be better encouraged throughout the whole process?
- Can more members from BME communities be encouraged to take part?
- How can communication with members over engagement with 'scary' activities be improved, to ensure that everyone who wants to opt out of certain experiences can – but without discouraging people from testing their limits and feeling great about what they have achieved?
- How can more members be encouraged to see the show?
- Can collaboration across artists and disciplines be better organised, with artists more fully involved at key stages and in early discussions? It was unfortunate that the planned 'Mash Up' event had to be cancelled as this might have focused on how experimentation and invention can happen in collaboration with artists from different disciplines and with different levels of experience or confidence.
- How can the Crisis involvement start even earlier, with early promotion of Hidden Spire opportunities to members; can even more Crisis staff/tutors actively promote the project?



## Impact on participants

Members who were deeply involved in one or more elements of the process talk of significant impacts for their perception of themselves; artists also spoke of impact on their personal attitudes and professional lives. Members and professional artists alike valued:

- The collaborative nature of the process
- Learning from working within such a diverse team
- Testing their boundaries and capabilities in a supportive environment
- The professional skills, opportunities and ambitions that Hidden Spire opened up for them.

Members in particular also spoke of:

- The transformative effects of working creatively
- The impact of feeling valued within a team
- Feeling braver, more confident and having higher self esteem.

Overall, Hidden Spire was very successful in having a significant impact on participants. A question arising from the evaluation focused on how to sustain and extend this impact.

- How can impact be sustained after the project ends? In previous years, Hidden Spire took place at Christmas time meaning that it was hard to follow through straight after the production to help members build on the experience. Presenting the show in September was a major improvement and each member involved in the project has had an opportunity to reflect on its meaning and use it positively. There is always more that could be done and a future project could look more formally at follow up.

## Audience/peer feedback

Audience and peer feedback was very positive across all aspects measured. In fact, both groups rated the performance more highly than self (participants') expectations; the greatest disparity was in the metrics of originality and excellence, where results suggest that AOFs and Hidden Spire participants could be more confident in the artistic value of their work.

Peers were surprised by the quality of the show, with an average 62% improvement in their scores after seeing the show, when they rated it an average of 8.13 out of 10. And the audience response was the highest of all groups, rating the show an average of 8.89 out of 10. Both peers and audience were very consistent, with high consensus in their scores.

Clearly the Hidden Spire team succeeded in delivering a high quality, professional show that satisfied a paying audience. Although still high scoring, the lowest metric for both peers (7.5) and audience (8.08) was 'meaning'. Could there be improvement in how Hidden Spire connects with personal meaning for audiences?



## The process

The process has been successful in creating good art that has impact on participants, and many of those consulted discussed the following aspects of the process as key:

**Flexibility** – a key part of the success of the project has been its flexibility throughout the process. The show, script and overall process were constructed in a way that allowed flexible numbers of members to participate at different stages, and could even cope with last minute changes in numbers of members who felt able to perform.

**Multivocality** – wide participation in many aspects of Hidden Spire from the start not only ensured deep impact and wide ownership, but also created a sense in the final piece of multivocality that audience and participants valued.

**Long timescale** – this version of Hidden Spire has

been expanded over 14 months, to accommodate a complex multi-disciplinary and inclusive process. This has given the project more time for developing ideas, properly inclusive practices, and feedback and discussion between stages – and this has improved the show and the process. There have been opportunities for immersion in the aspects of the process in the development phase, and in rehearsal, that participants found particularly impactful. It may be that shorter gaps between phases would help maintain momentum for the team but, overall, a longer process was helpful.

**Aiming high** – From the start, all elements of Hidden Spire aimed to produce good, interesting work. There was no sense of compromise related to inclusive practices. All participants felt that professionals and non-professionals alike made a good contribution to the project artistically; all participants felt fully valued and an important part of a team that was working to the highest standards – this brought the best out of people.

**Quality and attitude of professional artists involved** – The artists involved in the project all took a genuinely collaborative and inclusive attitude to the process; they were open to learning, flexible, and able to think on their feet. Without these qualities, the project could not have succeeded in the way that it did. The Hidden Spire Director held the large and diverse team together over a long, complex and often intense project, leading the project in a way that supported collaboration and inclusion.

**Level of support** – AOFS and Crisis staff provided support to artists and to members in working together throughout the process, which enabled the Hidden Spire process to happen, and the wide engagement of members, many with high support needs.

### Finally...

The development of Hidden Spire over three iterations has seen growth in scale and ambition, impact and quality. *Before the Tempest* was truly a team effort across disciplines, participants and levels of experience – and has had a significant impact on all involved. The show was enjoyed by audiences, and individual characters; the set, script, sound, lighting and costumes; and the experience overall, will be remembered by many. The project is now at a point where future development needs to be considered – how to take this successful project forward in a way that is new, while retaining the impact, excitement and learning from previous years? What happens After the Tempest?

## Thanks

Thanks are due to all those who took part in the evaluation process, including those involved in interviews, filled in questionnaires, gave in person and written feedback, and attended the learning event.

AOFS would like to thank the Creative Director, Lizzy McBain, the professional artists and members involved throughout the process, staff from Crisis and AOFS and audiences.

The project was only possible due to the close collaboration between



and



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and



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Photographs by James Sutton ([www.jamessuttonphotography.co.uk](http://www.jamessuttonphotography.co.uk)) and Josh Tomalin ([www.tomalinlightworks.com](http://www.tomalinlightworks.com))

# Appendix 1

## Hidden Spire CREDITS

**Writer** – Renata Allen

**Director** – Lizzy McBain

**Design** – Rachel Barbaresi and Emma Reynard

**Lighting Design** – Josh Tomalin

**Costume Design** – Suzie Burlton

**Composer** – Matt Winkworth

**Movement Director** – Emma Webb with Miranda Laurence

### Performers

Martin Blackwell

Steve Dineen

Tanner Efinger

Abi Hood

Rob Jones

Shaun O'Neill

Les Walker

**Musicians** – Matt Winkworth, Mikey Kirkpatrick

### Co-writers, devisers, designers and set-builders

Ada M

Adrian B

Angella Dare

Annette H

Christopher Bussell

Codi Tuppence

Daniel S

David C

Dennis D

Elisabeth C

Ellie Forrest

Elliot V

Emma Mayoux-Andrews

Gareth K

Georgina Williams

Gwinyayi N

Heather K

Jaime Woodham

James Brown

James T

Jazim Kadir

Joanna B

Joanna H

Joe R

Justin G

Karen W

Katherine O

Les Walker

Liam K

Marianne B

Martin Blackwell

Matthew M

Newlin D

Nigel S

Patrick S

Paul Milner

Peter Mayall

Rebecca V

Richard B

Robert J

Rosemary Cisneros

Sarah M

Shaun O'Neill

Shayan O

Simon Geoghan

Stephen Brooke

Stephen C

Suzie Krishan

Tashinga M

Teresa W

Tessa Jack

William D

Wolfie H

And three others

**Company/Stage Manager** - Jude Thorp with Mark Jackson

**Light and Sound** – Josh Tomalin

**Wardrobe** – Suzie Burlton with Codi Tuppence

**Set construction** - Diane Prayle, Richard Rose

**Stills Photography** - James Sutton, Josh Tomalin, Rachel Barbaresi

**Film** - Liam Martin, Sam King

**Gallery Exhibition Artist** – Nicola Armitage

**Exhibition second camera** – Danny Macgregor-Gill

**Exhibition sound** – Yannick Josse

**Exhibition curation and installation** – Sarah Mossop, Jack Eden, Paul Withers

**Front of House** – Amy Beddow, Cheryl Briggs, Adrian Chant, Megan Dawkins, Ellie Forrest, Alice Fox, Grace Khoo, Adam Leslie, Tricia McKenna, Rowan Padmore, Veronica Shannon

### For Arts at the Old Fire Station

**Director** – Jeremy Spafford

**Deputy Director** – Becca Vallins

**Marketing** – Alex Coke and Harriet Peacock

**Administration and Finance** – Andrea Walters and Becs Morris

### For Crisis

**Director** – Kate Cocker

**Arts Coordinator** – Helen Jukes

**Art Tutor** – Lucy Proctor

**Progression Support** – Chris Skerrett and the Crisis Progression Team

**The Crisis Reception Team**