

Face Front Inclusive Theatre

Innovative Proactive Wellbeing Activity

Face Front Inclusive Theatre uses the arts—drama, theatre, music, poetry, dance, movement, and film—to improve emotional wellbeing and address social injustice, particularly among disadvantaged, neurodiverse, and disabled individuals. Our mission is to create inclusive, transformative artistic experiences that empower communities and challenge inequality.

We deliver this through three key strands:

1. Community Participation: Our five inclusive theatre groups engage 140 members, offering regular creative opportunities for people of all abilities.
2. Theatre-in-Education/Tours: Reaching over 4,500 people annually, our inclusive productions—created and performed by disabled and non-disabled artists—tour schools and theatres to explore and raise awareness of social issues.
3. Training & Career Support: We support 45 disabled artists each year with training and career development, building clear pathways into the creative industries.

Through these programmes, we use the power of the arts to foster connection, encourage change, and create a more inclusive society. At the core of all our work is our belief that 'it's about belonging'. We bring people together through the arts to improve quality of life. Participants in our regular groups value their Face Front 'family' or 'community' and build support networks around their theatre participation. We work with, and for, people with physical, sensory and learning impairments, invisible disabilities and mental health issues, as well as disadvantaged, non-disabled people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds. Disabled people in particular face multiple challenges, including restricted access to leisure, employment and education due to physical, attitudinal and communication barriers as well as active discrimination.

Many young people we work with experience emotional and mental health issues—especially from experience of domestic abuse, bullying or the transition from school to adult life. Older and disabled beneficiaries face social isolation and poverty. Having celebrated our 25th anniversary and recently overcome significant challenges, we are optimistic and excited about our future as we deliver on our mission to address social injustice through multi-accessible theatre.

Examples of our Act the Part – participatory groups are:

InterACTion: An inter-generational theatre group in Enfield disabled/non-disabled participants aged 11-90+. InterACTion celebrates our 25th anniversary archive: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahIZjp1H_pw&t=10s

Broken Silence: A theatre group in Enfield for disabled adults (learning &/or sensory/mobility disabilities) Broken Silence celebrates our 25th anniversary archive:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtYA47-cgZl>

DDM: A dance, drama and music group in Enfield for young disabled people aged 12-18 years. DDM celebrates our 25th anniversary archive:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQf_SHBF9xl

Bridge Group: A first-step performing arts and wellbeing group in Enfield, reaching local people living with mental health issues who are socially isolated, and/or those who are disabled.

More about the Bridge Group: <https://youtu.be/JVr6LDAKzbs>

Blue Sky Actors: A theatre group in Newham for disabled adults. More about the group at: <https://www.facefront.org/act-the-part/blue-sky-actors/>

In 1998, a group of disabled and non-disabled artists came together with a vision to address the lack of opportunities for disabled people to work in the arts, and to make outstanding inclusive theatre for all audiences. By 2004, we were ready to become a company, and in 2006 we registered as a charity called Face Front Inclusive Theatre.

Now, Face Front Inclusive Theatre creates original, ground-breaking, inclusive theatre with a company of disabled and non-disabled artists. The company produces professional, entertaining and challenging multi-layered theatre, through its Theatre in Schools, Community Participation and Training Programmes. By 2023 we were celebrating 25 years! Face Front Inclusive Theatre goes above and beyond expectations in health and wellbeing by embedding emotional, mental, and social wellbeing into the core of its artistic mission. From its inception, the company has focused not just on inclusivity in the arts, but on creating meaningful, life-enhancing experiences for disabled and non-disabled people alike.

Here's how Face Front exceed expectations in this area:

Empowering Through Participation and Inclusion Face Front provides consistent, structured opportunities for over 130 participants weekly through its ACT the Part community groups. These inclusive environments foster a strong sense of belonging, purpose, and identity—critical factors for

emotional wellbeing. The company's model of encouraging participants to volunteer, join steering groups, and even sit on the board empowers individuals to shape the organization, boosting self-esteem and mental health.

Life-Changing Theatre with Social Impact

Their original, issue-based productions address difficult and often underrepresented topics—such as domestic abuse, transitions for disabled youth, sex and relationships, resilience, and inclusion. These themes are not only educational but therapeutic, offering audiences and participants alike an outlet to explore, process, and discuss complex emotions and experiences. This work directly supports psychological wellbeing by opening dialogue and reducing stigma.

Supportive Training and Employment Pathways

Face Front's training programme has supported over 300 disabled and neurodiverse actors, many of whom received their first professional opportunity with the company. The program builds skills, confidence, and employability—vital for mental health and long-term wellbeing. Graduates often go on to secure ongoing roles in the creative industries, breaking down barriers to access and reducing the isolation that many disabled individuals face.

Reach and Impact

With over 7,000 people reached annually, and 4,500 young people engaged through Theatre in Education each year, the scale of their wellbeing impact is significant. Their school productions, such as *Whisper Me Happy Ever After* and *It's My Move*, support emotional development, & health and wellbeing resilience among young audiences, offering age appropriate tools for coping with life transitions and challenges around domestic abuse.

Leadership and Representation

Face Front's commitment to involving participants, parents, and community members in leadership roles—from programme design to governance—creates an environment of respect, ownership, and representation. This kind of shared leadership is a powerful contributor to mental wellbeing, giving people agency and voice in their creative and community lives. Face Front Inclusive Theatre doesn't just produce inclusive art—it fosters long-term emotional and social wellbeing through creative empowerment, representation, and deeply supportive community structures. Their commitment to personal growth, community impact, and systemic change goes far beyond conventional expectations in health and Wellbeing.

As an inclusive theatre company, we strive to level the playing field by supporting disabled, diverse, and neurodiverse people to access and participate in the arts—whether as performers or professionals. Over the years, we've discovered that many people don't realise they can be involved in the arts or pursue it as a career. We work to break down those barriers and create clear pathways to engagement.

For our Act The Part community work, we work with each participant to create an individual development plan and during the weekly sessions the exercises are designed to boost individual and group skills. The effect of this on the individuals involved is transformational across all aspects of their lives and can improve their opportunity to participate in volunteering and employment.

Our groups address a wider need in its participants than simply a theatre group. In discovering new skills our participants feel an increased sense of self-worth and an awareness of what they can achieve. Many of our participants have spent their lives being told what they can't do and we help them to discover what they can. "My Nan attends their sessions during the week. I've seen her exercising, and laughing and just having a good time whilst staying healthy. It gets her out of the house and gives her a sense of belonging. She is always talking about how much she enjoys the group. I know at her age it's difficult as a lot of her friends have passed on, and some times it can be difficult to meet new people and find things to do that you enjoy. This theatre group provides that space for her. "We share our larger programme with 100+ partners (venues, schools and inclusive companies) to build bespoke relationship with each partner. Shared work across the venues includes developing audience access for disabled and diverse young people, creating and supporting inclusive and disability arts participation groups and facilitating exchange visits to the partner theatres to see each other's work both individually and as part of 'mini tours/festivals' of inclusive youth theatre.

Key local/wider partners include: Community Links Enfield & Edmonton, Council for Disabled Children, Enfield Disability Action, Enfield Age UK, Enfield Council, Park Avenue

Disability Resource Centre

We run two major touring initiatives Whisper Me Happy Ever After and It's My Move, which run annually, focused on health and wellbeing for young people which are well researched, meticulously rehearsed, and carefully targeted performances.

Whisper Me Happy Ever After is a play exploring the impact of domestic abuse on children's mental health. The play is both humorous and unsettling, using Forum Theatre techniques to engage young audiences. After the performance, pupils interact with characters, exploring ways to seek support and make positive choices. Our team and counsellor are available afterward to offer guidance and space for reflection.

'On behalf of the entire Barham Primary School community, I wanted to extend our deepest gratitude to you and the Face Front Inclusive Theatre team for the incredibly insightful and thought-provoking performance and forum on domestic abuse. The performance you delivered, portraying a family grappling with the complexities of domestic abuse, was both poignant and powerful. It managed to strike a delicate balance between humour and the stark realities of such a sensitive issue, leaving a lasting impact on our students. Your workshop not only raised awareness about the issue of domestic abuse but also sparked important conversations among our pupils about the effects on the mental health of children who witness it. The interactive nature of the session encouraged active engagement, allowing students to reflect on what they could do if faced with a similar situation. Moreover, the opportunity for our pupils to interact with the characters and explore alternative courses of action was invaluable. It provided them with practical insights and emotional support, empowering them to seek the help they need and deserve. Following the production Whisper Me Happy Ever After, our students had the opportunity to engage with your counsellor and team members to further discuss any personal issues raised by the play. This follow-up support was instrumental in ensuring that the impact of your workshop extended beyond the performance itself. Once again, thank you for your dedication to raising awareness about such an important issue and for your commitment to empowering young minds. Your work has undoubtedly left a lasting impression on our school community, and we are immensely grateful for your partnership.' Natalie Dweh, Associate Headteacher/Designated Safeguarding Leader, Barham Primary

Young people said:

'abuse is not only a bad and unacceptable thing, I learnt that it is against the law.'

'I learnt that if anything is going on you should tell a trusted adult and you can call Childline.'

'Never ever keep a secret as bad as that, it will get worse.'

'The actors were brilliant, it felt so real, it was funny and sad'

'I didn't want it to end, please, please come back again!'

'I am emailing to thank you and your brilliant team for bringing your fantastic performance to our year 5/6 pupils. It is such a necessary show that deals sensitively with issues of DV. Thank you for giving our pupils a forum where they can connect, reflect and discuss an issue that may be affecting them.'

Each tour can reach approx. 2800. The pupils were between 9-11 years of age and were accompanied by teachers and teaching assistants. They were clearly engaged and moved by the drama and following the show a total of 237 young people came to disclose to our team. It's My Move is a touring production, designed for disabled young people transitioning from school to adulthood. Developed with the Council for Disabled Children, it uses Forum Theatre to let the audience influence character outcomes and discuss real-life challenges. It features music, movement, poetry, Makaton, and film to ensure accessibility. The production employs five young, emerging disabled and neurodiverse actors from our programmes who are building careers in the arts.

Aims:

Reduce stress and anxiety around transition for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) and their carers
Help young people express their choices and for carers and professionals to listen
Improve understanding of the local offer and the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

Staff said:

'The most inclusive company I have seen, the best show I've seen'

'Amazing actors It has left an imprint on all students'

'It was so slick and professional fantastic actors and such good role models'

'Brilliant for all students very clear communication, visuals great, interaction very

appropriate for SLD/MLD students'

Parents said:

'We worry about our children how they will cope in college. This show is very good because it makes us think'

'It was so realistic the Mum was me, and it made me think about how I can help my son make his own choice'

In October and November 2023 & 2024, Face Front Inclusive Theatre toured It's My

Move into 40 special schools, colleges in London and Brighton. Across the two tours we performed 40 shows to 1990 SEN children/young people and teachers/TAs/parents/carers.

We also delivered sixteen Creative Industry Workshops to 334 SEN children/young people & teachers/TAs.

The following feedback was collected at the SEN schools

"An amazing company that have transformed the lives of disadvantaged people for so many years. Their work is powerful, engaging and community focused, often dealing with subjects and issues that raise awareness and enable audiences to engage in the process of change. They have positively impacted so many lives, improving emotional well-being and offering opportunities to those who aren't often represented in the arts. Our students have loved engaging with their productions as audiences over the years. Many of our students have also gone on to work with Face Front, gaining vital training and experience that has allowed them to take their first steps into the industry." Christine King, Parent Counsellor, Oak Lodge School Remembering Jon French, Executive Director & Co CEO of Face Front Inclusive Theatre

Sadly, Jon French passed away in January 2024 after a short illness. Jon was a founding member of the company and he brought a deep knowledge & understanding of inclusivity as an artist, director, facilitator & later as a strategic lead. He also led on finance for many years.

From the beginning of 2024 we had training with counsellors specialising in grieving for people with disabilities, specifically learning disabled to support all involved with Face Front. This helped us to managed the groups especially Broken Silence group which Jon codirected. As a company we continue to support everyone day by day and week by week. The Face Front family have & continue to experience great loss & adjustment last year and moving into 2025, however we also know Jon would want the projects & all the work to continue, which is how we have proceeded with managing the change.

Jon's obituary was published in The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2024/jan/24/jon-french-obituary>

We have a tribute to Jon on the Face Front Website

<https://www.facefront.org/in-lovingmemory-of-jon-french-face-front-co-founder-and-co-ceo/#prettyPhoto/0/>

Jon also narrates a short promo film about Face Front's The Bridge Group and about FFIT's other work. This link <https://youtu.be/JVr6LDAKzbs>