

The following extracts of an interview with Emma Cahill (Daily Life Ltd) and Lucy Wells (Inclusive Arts Manager, Bromley By Bow Centre) reflect on the imperative and practicalities of collaborating on an accessible performance of *Mad Gyms and Kitchens* for people who attend the centre and for whom English is not their first language. The interview took place on July 20<sup>th</sup> 2014.

**LW:** This area is so multicultural and there's so many different languages spoken here. The Bromley by Bow Centre is pretty good at representing that in terms of people who access space as well as the staff. Right from the off there was always talk about wanting to make the work accessible to as many people as possible and that while things are performed in English, there will always be a level of inaccessibility for some people. ESOL was a big part of the learning programme here and I was really keen to use that as a doorway into those communities, because I think when language is an issue building relationships, there is that an added challenge to it. So I was really keen to kind of engage the two, obviously delivered on the ESOL programme and that whole programme really. It was tough trying to co-ordinate booking the space here with Daily Life Ltd and all the other commitments that you've got but the aspiration was good and slowly what came out of it was this core group of women on the ESOL programme who were up for being involved, a Somali women's group here and others interested in this whole notion of language and how we could open that up.

There were logistical challenges getting these three groups together as it was exam time and then they were going on trips. And then it was a glorious sunny day and I think one of those nightmare classic things where, at the last minute, the person who heads up the Somali women's group had to take her daughter somewhere, someone else couldn't come, and it was one of those things where everyone's pulling out right at the last minute. That said there were six who were still able to come.

**EC:** In total we had about 15 people there, which isn't our smallest audience. We always wanted it to be smaller because of the time it would have taken to translate. If there was an audience of 40 people there, the amount of time it would have actually taken to stop, translate and clarify...

**LW:** It would have doubled the running time wouldn't it really? Because the idea was that if you spoke Bengali, you'd sit near your Bengali buddy who'd speak English as well. If you were Somali you'd sit near a Somali buddy. And at points Bobby would stop and then the buddy would give their précis of what was going on. And there was that handful of women who came beforehand.

**EC:** That was the highlight of the show I think, the beginning bit, before the show even started.

**LW:** They had tea and cake, Bobby introduced herself, had a chat with them, and that was really good. They were so earnest and committed about what was happening, it felt like a really reverent conversation. It was really nice. They were all primed, ready to go. But unfortunately there were very few people to interpret for, but then another handful of people did come. This performance felt intimate.

**EC:** It felt like a group of friends getting round and one of them was just telling a story. It was also very sincere. Bobby dialled the performance back – she is very skilled at judging the atmosphere, understanding who she's performing to and what's appropriate. It was a bespoke performance of *Mad Gyms and Kitchens*.

**LW:** You felt it. It felt really generous somehow, like this is specifically for you. Earlier in the afternoon I was so gutted that things weren't going to work out in the way that I'd hoped, that the audience numbers were so low. Delivering integrated services here is a daily challenge. But, when the performance started, there was a beautiful relief about realising what was happening in the room with that group of people. The group of women who came beforehand talked through this emotion of interpreting what that means and how it's going to work: the connection with them was significant it wasn't fleeting. I feel pretty confident that with that investment with that process they will be ambassadors out into a community that is often incredibly difficult to reach. This is a really exciting thing for us as an organisation, for Daily Life, but also for them. It's having an active role in change. It's really great.

There was definitely a side of the show coming here that I felt was like a gift, an opportunity to shift things here. I recognise it's a very slow, gentle process but I am

really interested in how this space can be opened up for much more as a multi-purpose space. We don't have the structure or the systems that support an operational cultural venue. Essentially we're a health and community centre, which in many ways is incredibly efficient and because there's so many different things that happen here, in many ways it bumbles along in terms of how it delivers things. When you come here at the weekend, this building, when it's shut up, looks like a sleeping animal. The one thing that this place has which is a huge asset is space and I would love to see it used much more. In our immediate location, the urban landscape is changing dramatically. Even since I started working here, two years ago, it's totally different, blocks of apartments have gone up, there's a whole new demographic that's moved in. I'm keen to engage with those new community members so that the Centre in some small way plays a part in preventing that kind of division within communities, which is really around affluence and social mobility. There are pockets of massive poverty here: financial poverty, poverty of health, poverty of social capital but springing up around those pockets is massive investment in terms of money and kind of infrastructure. The Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park is just over there with all kinds of cultural centres moving into it. And it's a big remit of the Centre to play a part in trying to stop certain areas of our community getting left behind. The Centre is a space that is genuinely used by everyone and that will go a long way in keeping a kind of equal playing field in a way for people. So, in a big roundabout way, having a ticketed show that is, even if you took the kind of health element out of it, a piece of performance art which is recognised as high quality and linked to a wider network of cultural arts delivery, is a big thing for us. I'd like to see how we use the space much more in those out of hours times and how you specifically invite new and changing audiences.