

25 July 2019

## Stories of Oldham's communities on stage at the Coliseum

On Thursday 18 July Oldham Coliseum Theatre hosted two performances created using the words, artwork and poetry of people living in the borough of Oldham.

The performances – **Culture Hubs** and **Local Lives** – were a sharing and celebration of the theatre's work with **Regenda Homes** and **Housing 21**, using creative practice to help tackle social isolation and support older people in our communities. Both events were performed by a cast of professional actors: Isabel Ford, Richard J Fletcher and Perveen Hussain, and directed by Alyx Tole.

**The Coliseum** has been working with **Housing 21**, a leading not-for-profit provider of retirement housing and extra care for older people, since 2018. Initially through consultation with residents, the Coliseum planned and designed creative programmes of work to be delivered in each Housing 21 court. **Culture Hubs** was a celebration and culmination of the artwork, writing and poetry produced by Housing 21 residents across Oldham.

With artwork created by residents projected onto the back of the stage, the performance included a short piece about working in the mills of Oldham, a A-Z poem of Oldham's memories and a short play set in a local pub over three generations supported by writer Carole Solazzo. The event was attended by the residents and staff of Housing 21 from across Oldham, who also enjoyed tea and cakes in the theatre's stalls bar before the performance.

**Tejinder Birk, Partnerships Manager at Housing 21 commented:** *"The production was brilliant and the residents enjoyed it especially where their work, songs and words were shared. They definitely felt honoured to have their involvement in the workshop sessions put to a wonderful stage performance."*

In partnership with **Regenda Homes**, as part of Thriving Hollinwood PBI initiative, the **Local Lives** project was set up to identify people living within the Hollinwood area who may be feeling socially isolated or lonely. Working with local partners in the Hollinwood area to identify and refer people into the project, the Coliseum ran creative sessions exploring the local area with people from a range of different settings, ages and backgrounds to develop insights into how people view and envisage the themes of community and togetherness.

The **Local Lives** performance was created from the conversations that took place; the memories, stories and thoughts generated within each workshop. Every word of the short play was spoken or had been developed by people living in Hollinwood. The story highlighted the importance of everyday conversations, social interactions with different people from our community and a good cup of tea.

The performance was attended by a range of people of different ages and backgrounds including young people from Oasis Academy Oldham, members of Walkers Road Tenants

Association and members of Full Circle over 50s social group. The event was also accompanied by an exhibition in the theatre's Education Suite which hosted stands from Age UK, Action Together and Oldham Library, providing information on groups and opportunities to get involved in across the borough.

**Beckie Kirkland, Regeneration Officer at Regenda Homes commented:** *"The Local Lives Project was a great way to creatively engage community members who felt like they were socially isolated or lonely. We aimed to engage many different people and we did - anyone can feel lonely: young, elderly or families - so opening this project up to a variety of people was important to us. We will continue to work with the groups and people involved as part of the Thriving Hollinwood Initiative to ensure carry on for the project and lead people into other activities happening in their local neighbourhood."*

The **Local Lives** event is intended to act as a catalyst in referring people to other relevant services, launch legacy projects, share learning and importantly, bring people together.

**Carly Henderson, Head of Learning and Engagement at Oldham Coliseum Theatre, added:** *"It was lovely to bring groups together to share and celebrate in the creation of this work at the Coliseum. We want the theatre to be reflective of the diversity of Oldham, and having such a range of voices and stories presented side by side was brilliant to see."*

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#### **Notes to Editor:**

For further press information, please contact Shelly Ramsdale on 0161 785 7012 or [shellyramsdale@coliseum.org.uk](mailto:shellyramsdale@coliseum.org.uk)

#### **Oldham Coliseum Theatre**

Oldham Coliseum Theatre is a cultural and educational charity that works with over 150,000 individuals per year.

The Coliseum has a rich history in Greater Manchester dating back to 1885. It provides a wide variety of distinctive theatre performances and participatory activities for people from all communities in Oldham, Greater Manchester and beyond. It creates original productions which are presented at the Coliseum and on tour. Intrinsic to the town's on-going regeneration, the theatre works with its local communities and young people to develop creative programmes to facilitate learning, engagement and community cohesion.