

Theatre Royal Bath Engage & Achieve Together Collaboration



The Miss Beryl Billings
Charitable Trust



‘Engage Together’ was a partnership between the Theatre Royal Bath’s Engage programme and Achieve Together, Educational Day Services, September 2023 – November 2025

Achieve Together, Educational Day Services Team

Achieve Together provides open and inclusive day services in Bath for adults who are deaf, deafblind or have hearing loss and other complex needs. The Day Service supports individuals to develop new skills, experience new activities, communicate in their preferred way, develop social connections, and achieve personal goals through tailored learning programmes.

Engage at Theatre Royal Bath

Engage is the Theatre Royal Bath’s adult participation programme offering workshops, courses and productions, supporting adults from all backgrounds and levels of experience to get involved in theatre.

During a landmark 18 month partnership, Engage Together:

- Brought together a newly formed group of 12 learning disabled and d/Deaf adults
- Held weekly drama and performance sessions
- Sessions took place at Achieve Together’s Educational Day Services provision, and then at The Egg theatre in Bath
- Sessions were led by Engage Theatre practitioners Sophie Cottle and Rose Wardlaw and supported by Jade Wainwright from Achieve Together.
- Created and performed **The Seven Deadly Sins** (2024), winning two Creative Bath awards.
- 3 performers went on to take part in TRB’s large scale community production of **David Copperfield: A Life** (2026)

“At the start, we were just doing simple drama games and then building that over time. They’ve learnt so much, I can see how much they have really come on...incredible to watch”

Jade Wainwright, Achieve Together



I BELONG

“The empathy between the group grew throughout, a sense of belonging developed – individuals felt valued and that they were able to take up space.”

Rose Wardlaw, Engage Theatre Practitioner

Group Identity

It took time for the new group to coalesce, but strong bonds and a shared sense of identity developed. Attendance became consistent and commitment grew.

Community Connection

The performance of **The Seven Deadly Sins** deepened this sense of community.

“That was the biggest bonding experience. The performance made it real — they weren’t just attending anymore, they belonged. One striking example is Shane. He’s known for asking people for autographs, but when his photo was taken for ‘The Seven Deadly Sins’ he cried because he felt part of something.”

Sophie Cottle, Engage Theatre Practitioner

Inclusion

The sense of belonging began to extend to the wider theatre world.



“Because of their access needs, they rarely get to see plays or go to the theatre, making it amazing for them to experience being part of it, with all the lights and learning about backstage”

Jade

Left: **The Seven Deadly Sins**

I LEARN

Creative, Social and Emotional Skills

Participants developed skills in puppetry and storytelling, character development, communication and teamwork.



“Having been there from the start. I can see how much they really have learnt – it’s been so incredible to watch.”

Jade

‘Acting gave him a way to express emotions and regulate himself’

Sophie

“The group began to share their ideas with increasing confidence, gradually taking ownership of creative decisions. We moved from leading the work to asking them what they wanted. That’s when they realised — their ideas mattered. The biggest surprise wasn’t their ability, it was how far they wanted to go.”

Rose

Challenging Expectations

‘I learnt about singing and signing together, and dancing, being on time with the music, I could feel the vibrations, that’s how I kept in time. I also learnt about Independence for travelling, getting to rehearsals, I felt much more independent and able to travel... my mum can be nervous about me travelling on the bus and the train but this really helped mum’s confidence as well, to see how independent I could be.’

Jonathan Merritt – Group Member

I FEEL WELL

Personal Growth

“Zara would never have done anything like this before. Over time she gradually built confidence. By ‘Seven Deadly Sins’ she really felt part of the whole community and the group. She went on to be part of ‘David Copperfield’, which was a huge commitment for her. She was a leading role in the company and created new friends and connections in the theatre community.”

Jade

Left: Zara May in **David Copperfield: A Life**



Confidence

For participants, a real transformation took place.

“Sherrie took a long time before she even felt comfortable sitting in the circle. By the end of year one she performed as a lion on stage at The Egg”.

Sophie

Health

For some participants with physical disabilities, including cerebral palsy, there was visible improvement in movement and confidence using their bodies. Involvement also had a noticeable impact on wellbeing.

“They always left with more energy than when they arrived”

Sophie



I CREATE

“We gave them the framework, but the work had to come from them.”

Rose

Creative Leadership

For **The Seven Deadly Sins**, the group were provided with a creative brief, access to a creative team and the work was entirely devised by them. Participants gained technical and production skills, were involved in casting ideas and contributed to costume design.

Becoming Artists

As a result, the group began to see themselves differently, not just as participants — but as artists.



“The group were blown away that their creative contributions were included in a professional production.”

Sophie

“Seeing them meet that challenge — that’s what I’m most proud of.”

Rose

Participants were empowered to start thinking of themselves as artists independently.

“Jonathan surprised us. Over time he began thinking beyond the workshops and considering paid employment.”

Rose

Next Steps..

This project has left a lasting impact — on participants, artists and the wider theatre community. Both lead practitioners shared how the project has been life-changing for them as practitioners and the participants.

Participants:

- Developed confidence
- Challenged expectations and grew in independence
- Built creative and communication skills
- Benefitted from strong friendships and support networks
- Gained a sense of belonging and ambition around their place in the world of theatre

“You'd think the world is moving forward and that things are changing, around the barriers disabled people face, but it's still so hard to find truly inclusive theatre. Just seeing how much effort everyone has put in to make it possible is really moving.”

Jade

““It was a joy working with the Educational Day Services team and the people they support. This partnership has allowed Engage to develop our participation practice, been transformative for our work, and will help shape future plans for Engage and the new venue, The Billings.”

Katherine Lazare, Head of Community Engagement



“Being on stage in front of an audience and being a professional actor was a lifelong dream for Shane. So it was just amazing to see him do just that - something that without this collaboration, could never have been made possible.”

Jade

Find out more about Engage at
theatreroyal.org.uk/take-part/engage-adult-creative-learning/