

Astra and Patrick - at the New Wolsey Theatre.

**Jan Parry, Mayor of Ipswich talking about the impact of Youth Social Action
February 2020**

These are what you might say brave young people. They may not see themselves in that way. It is brave enough to take part in theatre and performance on any level, let alone dealing with hard hitting and challenging matters which need to be exposed and talked about. We cannot shy away from the lived experience of our young people – they are not ! They have found the strength and resilience to reflect on their lives in a variety of ways and it may be that this performance is a kind of culmination.

Learning about their work has been a revelation for me. I can feel the power and the potential of what they have done and I have immense respect for them and the people who work with them. I am proud that I have been able to give them some public recognition on behalf of the council and the community and to help them to celebrate what they are doing and their achievements.

When I was elected Mayor I knew that I wanted to support a group which works with young people. Tavis Spencer Aitkens was murdered on 2nd June 2018 just a month after I had become a councillor. I knew that young people across the town were in great need of support. I have 2 sons, my youngest was 20 at the time, and I know about the emotional needs of young people, especially the huge importance of peer groups and social media and the need for safety, security and emotional connection with people who can let them be themselves. What do you do when your community and role models are toxic ? Young people need to have control and self determination, meaning and purpose, to help them cope when they see and experience suffering, difficulty, stress and trauma, which they do.

So when I met Stephen Skeet and Tonia Wilson at Volunteering Matters I was able to learn about their work with WASSUP and WE ARE PATRICK and the model called Youth Social Action which was new to me. I could see that Youth Social Action is a powerful engine which can move young people. It can be a real catalyst for positive change in the lives of those who take part and also all those who encounter them when they visit schools and places where young people meet, enabling them all to name, see beyond and rise above the situations they are in.

When you give children the tools to determine their own futures they can achieve so much in their lives. All they need is for the whole community to be willing to invest in and support them and they will run with it. We all need to understand that all the children in our community are our children.

Even in the short time I have known the WASSUP and WE ARE PATRICK groups, I have seen them grow. I love to see the pride, confidence and blossoming and the sense of belonging, connection and ownership which gives these young people a springboard from which to fly into the future.

It takes a special model and organisation to allow young people the autonomy and power to express themselves in any way they choose and it is a privilege to see them translating their own experience into work which has genuine impact. These are impressive young people and to watch them become confident and articulate role models who themselves reach many vulnerable young people across Ipswich gives me real hope. They are rapidly becoming youth mentors, leaders and ambassadors.

I want to thank you for inviting me to be part of this evening and I know that this performance could not have taken place without the wonderful Tony Casement, Head of Creative Learning at the New Wolsey Theatre. What a fantastic collaboration and gift. Theatre and poetry and performance and music can truly be the life blood in a town, they certainly were for me growing up here, and I love that this is happening now.

You have on your programmes a list of others we must thank, including Tim Passmore and the Suffolk Community Foundation. The list is in itself a reflection of how we can come together, including not least the friends, family and colleagues, and especially Tonia and all of the team at Volunteering matters, for their enormous expertise and commitment over the past year to bring this piece of work to us, and the work of Stephen Skeet and Volunteering Matters for steering the vessel. I would like to invite him and you all to speak and discuss now, as you wish, and think about what we can all do now and in the future to support these groups and youth social action in Ipswich. cStephen will be contacting us all in the coming week and we should be in no doubt that it is for our whole community to play our part. I want our young people to know that Ipswich is theirs, that the councils and community care about and are listening to them and that they have great opportunities ahead, that they will be able to shape their future and make a positive difference. We all need to know and believe that we can change things for the better by caring for each other in our communities, and the work starts right here. It is incumbent upon us all, young and not so young, to play our part.

Thank you !

Jan Parry - Mayor of Ipswich.