



plugged in

...to your local venue

a don't panic guide for Community Promoters

What is Plugged In?

Plugged In is an Arts Council funded project that works with four local authority venues and community promoters to bring high quality theatre, art and music to Blackburn, Darwen, Nelson and Colne.

Our four venues are:

- King George's Hall, Blackburn
- Darwen Library Theatre, Darwen
- The ACE Centre, Nelson
- The Muni, Colne

These four venues are council owned and traditionally provide their local community with mainstream entertainment events such as comedians, tribute bands and film, but have very little in the way of professional theatre or other high quality art events. This isn't because they don't *want* to programme events like this but putting on theatre can be financially risky for our venues in a time of budget cuts and constraints. Plugged In takes away this risk, by providing a guarantee against loss and extra financial support (explained further on in the handbook).

We wanted to bring about a change in programming but we didn't want to bring events that local people weren't interested in seeing, so we decided to hand over the programming to the community.

We work alongside community promoters at each venue, who choose events they think local audiences want to see. They decide which high quality show to bring to the area, the ticket price, how the event should be marketed and even run the event on the night.

This pack talks you through what is involved with being a community promoter and how to go about hosting a show at one of our venues. Plugged In's Stephie Jessop will work with you at every step of the way and if you have any further questions you can speak to her by calling the Culturapedia office on 01254 674 777 or send her an email at stephie@culturapedia.co (just *.co* NOT *.com* or *.co.uk!*)

Being a Community Promoter...

- **Who can be a Community Promoter?**

Anyone living locally to one of our venues can be a community promoter. We work with established groups, individuals, young people and everyone else in between. We simply ask that you have an interest in the performing arts (theatre, music, dance etc) and that you're passionate about making things happen in your area.

- **Working in a group or going it alone?**

In the past we have worked with established community groups to host one off events in one of our venues, for example Nelson In Bloom hosted a magic show at The ACE Centre and youth group SLYNCS hosted an award winning piece of physical theatre at King George's Hall. We would still love to hear from groups like this and if you think your group could work with us, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

However, going forward we are looking to work with people who will become ambassadors for our venues. Whether you're a group of friends or an enthusiastic audience member looking to get more involved with theatre, we want to work with you.

It might be that you're an individual passionate about putting on music events and you choose to work on your own, with Plugged In and a venue to make that happen. Or you might want to join one of our more established promoters groups, such as the Darwen Library Theatre (DLT) Community Promoters, who meet once a month and decide on, promote and host work as a team.

- **What is involved and what is the commitment I'm expected to make?**

Depending on whether you are going it alone, an established community group, or joining one of our existing promoters teams, the commitment to the project is slightly different. But the basic format we follow is this:

1. You choose a show from our menu of events that you would like to see at your local venue
2. You choose the date of the show, the start time and ticket prices

3. You work with Plugged In and the venue to organise the promotion and the marketing of your chosen event. This can be just putting up posters, handing out leaflets and using your own networks to create a buzz about the show, or you might want to create a marketing stunt, organise group bookings or personally sell tickets (there is more information about marketing your event further on in the pack)
4. You host the event on the night, welcome the audience, help with ushering & front of house and collect audience feedback
5. You debrief with Plugged In and the venues about how you thought the show went, what was really good and what could be done differently.

Most of our promoters host one event per season but our more established groups now host two events in Autumn and up to three in Spring/Summer. Remember that when you choose a show, this might be up to six months before the actual event, so you should be prepared to see it through from start to finish. This might mean you pick a show and then have a very quiet three months before the marketing kicks in in the run up to the actual event.

If you are a lone promoter this can be quite a big ask, so it's a good idea to have some friends in mind who can act as helpers on the night and with putting up posters etc. If you're part of a group then the responsibilities are divided between you all. We generally ask that you attend a Plugged In meeting once a month and are prepared to give us some extra time (maybe on weekends or evenings) as the event gets closer.

- **How do I become a promoter?**

If you haven't already spoken to Stephie about becoming a promoter then give her a call on 01254 674 777 and she can talk through the process with you, invite you along to the next group meeting or work with you individually to set you up as a lone promoter.

Working with your venue...

Plugged In exists because we are aware that audiences for high quality theatre and arts events in our venues are low. This might be because these venues haven't been able to make much of an arts offer in the past or because people have had a bad experience. Each of our venues has its own stumbling blocks that we want to work with you and the venues to overcome and to make positive long lasting changes.

Changes like this won't happen overnight but we want to hear your honest feedback, and new ideas for what we can try. Plugged In is a partnership between you and the venue and it is important that we work together on organising your event.

When you become a promoter we'll fully introduce you to the venue, taking you on a tour, introducing you to key members of staff and briefing you on the technical capabilities - things like how many seats there are, how big the stage is and how many artists you can squeeze in at once!

We invite staff from the venues to attend promoter meetings and they also help us put together menus for you to choose from. They are as enthusiastic about making these changes as you are. The venues will be there to advise you on what dates are available, they will provide staff for the event and Plugged In events are marketed, sold and treated in exactly the same way as their own events.

With this in mind, it is important to understand that sometimes it isn't always easy to programme theatre on a Friday or a Saturday because they may have a big comedian coming in, or the venue might have some concerns about ticket prices and they know best what their venues are technically capable of hosting. The venue staff have a lot of great knowledge and experience and are always ready to have their brains picked!

Having said that, in the past we've decorated foyers, turned theatres into festivals and hosted shows in green rooms. If we work together nearly anything is possible.

Plugged In is run day-to-day by Stephie, who will act as a go-between for you and the venues. She is responsible for putting together menus for you to choose from and liaising with the artists, companies and venues, once a show is booked. Stephie isn't employed by the venues so if you have any questions or concerns she is your first port of call!

Choosing a show...

When choosing a show for your venue there are a number of things to consider. Our menu of events you can pick from is put together by Stephie and she is aware of what each venue is capable of holding. So the shows you have to choose from *could* all be put on in your venue, but the most important question is what do YOU WANT to put on?

Remember you'll be the person (or people) on the ground encouraging people to come to the show and the best way to convince other people to see something is with your own enthusiasm! Presuming you have enthusiasm by the bucket load, here are a few things to ask yourself and remember when picking a show:

- **What is already on at your venue and what is missing?**

You don't want to programme more folk music if you already have a calendar full of dates for other folk acts. Instead look at something that is missing, or that there might be a demand for in your area.

- **What else is already happening in your area?**

Remember that if you live somewhere that has an abundance of spoken word events happening this could work both against you and in your favour. You don't want to steal audiences from other places, but if that audience exists you could offer them something new to try!

- **Who is your audience?**

You might have a very specific audience in mind that you want to attract to the venue. Which shows would appeal to them the most? This is also an important question to think about when it comes to marketing your event.

- **Look at all the material in front of you**

When putting together our menu of events for you to choose from, we try to build as clear a picture as possible as to what the show is. This often includes marketing materials, links to trailers and websites, or reviews of previous work by the company. Take a look through everything we put in front of you. It isn't always possible for you

to see a show before you book it, so this is the next best way of arming yourself with information you'll then pass on to potential audiences!

- **Don't be afraid to try something new!**

You might not have ever heard of Showstopper! The Improvised Musical, and you may not have had any experience selling a show like it, but neither had the DLT Community Promoters in Spring 2016 and it proved to be their most successful event! Plugged In provides a chance to offer something new to our promoters and our audiences! If you like the sound of it, give it a try!

- **Bring your own suggestions and experiences to the table**

If you've seen something amazing in another venue maybe you want to try something similar at ours! Just because something isn't on the menu doesn't mean it is off the table. As you grow in confidence as a promoter we'll be looking to you to shape our programme further!

Handling contracts, fees & other logistics...

Once you've chosen your show, Stephie will handle the contracts with the artists and organise the financial side with the venues. She is also responsible for making sure the technical team have all the information they need and that the show itself goes smoothly. She will include you in this process and as your experience grows as a promoter you may want to get more involved in this side of it.

As a promoter, you are not responsible for the cost of the show but we do include this information on your menu as it is important to consider it when thinking about setting ticket prices etc.

Plugged In works as a guarantee against loss for the venue, which means that if the ticket sales don't cover the cost of a show, Plugged In funds the difference, for example:

If the cost of the show to the venue is (this is what we pay the artists):	But we only make this much in ticket sales:	Then this is the amount Plugged In will give to the Venue:
£600	£425	£175

This means that programming great theatre is no longer a risk to the venue, and this is the reason Plugged In exists. However we won't be around forever and in an ideal situation our shows will start paying for themselves, meaning that the venue can afford to continue programming great art and working with community promoters without our funding!

Marketing your event...

Once you've chosen your event you'll want to make sure as many people hear about it as possible and buy tickets! Marketing for every show will be slightly different, but here are a few starting points:

- **Who is your audience?**

You'll already have thought about this when choosing your show, but it is important to really keep them in mind when thinking about your marketing. If you know who you want to reach it's much easier to work out where you'll find them! For example, if your event is a family show you'll want to get in touch with the schools and local nurseries, but if your event is a music night maybe you'll want to start with putting posters up in local music bars.

- **Choosing your ticket prices**

Choosing your ticket price is really important when thinking about appealing to your audiences. Too high and you might not be able to sell to people in your local area, but too low diminishes the quality of the show! You'll also want to take into account the cost of the show and how many tickets you would need to sell to make a profit. If you're worried about prices, you could always create a special offer, maybe a group booking discount, or a family ticket that covers any four people.

- **Putting up posters and handing out leaflets**

Every show will provide you with leaflets and posters to put up. Our venues can distribute some of these, but we always have extras. It's best to put up posters about 3 weeks before an event, otherwise they fall down or get covered up! Think about where your audience is most likely to see them and make the most of community notice boards etc. We have a handy list of poster distribution suggestions at the end of the pack and Stephie has area specific ones she can give you too!

Leaflets are always most effective when handed directly into somebody's hand, preferably accompanied by an enthusiastic conversation with yourself! It's always good to have some flyers with you for when you're chatting to people out and about or at other events (but always ask for permission). There are loads of examples on our website about how to get people actually reading your leaflets.

- **Using your own networks**

Word of mouth is always the most effective tool for selling a show and creating a buzz. Think about who you already know that might be interested in the show and maybe they can become a helper! Are there any other groups you're a part of or know of that might want to make a group booking? Reach out to the people you know first and your enthusiasm will soon rub off on them!

- **Social Media**

Are you on facebook, twitter, instagram? If not don't worry, but these are great ways of reaching new audiences and telling people about your event. All our venues have their own social media and will create facebook events you can share and tweets you can retweet onto your own network. If all that sounds like gobbledygook then is there someone who can help with it, or maybe you want to work with Stephie who can talk you through it?

- **What do we do?**

Each venue has their own marketing team and we have a Press Officer at Plugged In HQ as well. Your events will be included in venue brochures and on their website, just like all their other events. We will send out press releases and we have good links with BBC Radio Lancashire, but if you have your own contacts don't be afraid to use them! You can speak to Jack our Press Officer directly if you want a copy of the press release or have somebody you think he should speak to by calling the office on 01254 674 777.

We also have our social media, newsletter and mailing distribution lists we can use, and we'll let you know about what we've already done and if there is anything you should be looking out for!

- **Outreach workshops, marketing stunts and extra events...**

We have money in the budget to hold extra events that help create a buzz about the show. For example we've put bands on in Darwen Markets, which gave us a great opportunity to hand out flyers and get people talking. We've hosted free arts and craft workshops in libraries for family shows. This is the type of thing that Stephie can organise with you at promoters meetings, and it's a really good way of tailor making a marketing campaign for each separate show. There are more examples of things that we've done in the past included at the end of this pack.

On the night...

The event itself is where all your hard work pays off. You've organised a great artist coming to your area and sold all the tickets you can, now you'll want to make sure everyone who comes has an amazing experience!

Our venues provide front of house staff (people on box office and ushering) and bar staff, and Stephie will be there making sure the artists are happy and everything goes smoothly. Your main role on the evening will be making sure that your audience feel happy and welcomed. There are a number of things you might want to do or get involved with on the night:

- **Decorating the foyer or setting up a workshop**

In the past, our promoters have decorated the foyer areas of our venues, theming an event or hosting free workshops before shows for families to get involved. This all adds to the audience's experience and might be something you want to think about when planning your event.

- **Giving a warm welcome**

Chances are you will recognise a number of people in your audience from having spoken to them and encouraged them to buy tickets. We want our venues to feel

warm and welcoming and like a community hub, so it's great to have familiar faces welcoming people in and directing them to where they need to be. People may be brand new to your venue, so being able to tell people where the box office is or where the toilets are is really important.

- **Know your show and arrive early**

People will quite often ask if there is an interval or what time the show will finish, so it's important to know these things on the night. Stephie will organise a briefing to happen on the night before the audience arrive covering anything an audience member might ask you and what you'll need to do in your set roles. Our venues open to the public an hour before the show is due to start and your briefing will normally be 15 minutes before that.

- **Hosting a raffle**

You may want to host a raffle in the interval to raise funds for a local charity or cause. This can add a nice community feel to the event, a few high quality prizes work best! Shows have a strict running time and you want to leave enough time at the interval for people to go and get a drink, pop to the loo and chat about what they've seen so far!

- **Feedback and thank yous...**

We collect audience feedback at the end of every show. This is REALLY important for our Arts Council funding and really helps you programme any future events. This is generally done with a feedback questionnaire that is handed out at the end of the show. It's also a good idea to make a speech at the end of an event, thanking the venue, Arts Council, artists & the audience and to also introduce you as a promoter! If you're a little uncomfortable doing this, Stephie can make it, but be on hand to hand out questionnaires and chat to people about what they thought.

- **Capture your audience!**

You'll have worked really hard to build an audience for your event so you don't want to let them go without getting an email address from them or putting a leaflet for your next event in their hand first! Have mailing list sign up sheets to hand, and give out flyers as people are leaving. This means you won't have to start from scratch for your next event!

- **Tidying away**

If you've decorated the foyer or held a workshop it's a good idea to tidy everything away on the night, the venue staff will empty the theatre of any rubbish and will be busy cleaning the bar, so anything extra is ours to clean up!

- **But most importantly of all... ENJOY IT**

You've worked really hard to get your event up and off the ground and once that curtain goes up you can just sit back and enjoy the show... and hopefully everything else that goes with it!

After the event...

After the event it's important to evaluate what you thought of the show, how you marketed it and what you might do differently. After every event Stephie will organise a debrief meeting with you normally the week after, where you'll go through the audience feedback, talk about your own opinions and fill out a quick promoters evaluation form. This is a great way of looking at how the project is going, but also take in what you've learnt for going forward with future programming.

Some useful links, examples and resources...

Hopefully now you feel fully prepared for hosting an event at your local venue. Remember Stephie is always available to help out and you can contact her with any questions or worries you have!

The rest of this pack is made up of some useful links and resources you might need when hosting a show...

Examples of previous marketing events:

- A. Silvermoon Jazz Band at Darwen Market to promote a WW2 themed comedy show at Darwen Library Theatre
- B. The Troll Trail - a competition which led families around Darwen with a set of clues trying to find the trolls to promote a folk storytelling show
- C. The Museum of Brilliant Things - A pop up museum in Colne Market asking people what would be on their list of brilliant things to promote 'Every Brilliant Thing' at The Muni
- D. Gingerbread decorating workshop at Nelson Library to promote 'Hansel and Gretel' at The ACE Centre
- E. Colouring in competitions to schools - done for almost all of our children's shows
- F. Poet Dommy B visited schools before his show 'The Dragon Who Hated Poetry' came to The ACE Centre
- G. Pop up box office and flash mob in Blackburn town centre for LIGHT at King George's Hall

Blog posts you might find interesting:

Why A Conversation Can Be More Important Than a Leaflet:

<http://itspluggedin.com/2016/02/16/why-a-conversation-can-be-more-important-than-a-leaflet/>

Preparing for 'American Servicemen' coming to Darwen:

http://itspluggedin.com/2015/09/28/preparation-for-american-servicemen-in-britain/?relatedposts_hit=1&relatedposts_origin=625&relatedposts_position=2

Phase 1: Why Working with Community Promoters is so important:

http://itspluggedin.com/2016/02/21/plugged-in-phase-1-working-with-our-community-promoters/?relatedposts_hit=1&relatedposts_origin=280&relatedposts_position=0

Photos of our past events, marketing stunts and more:

<http://itspluggedin.com/gallery/>

Suggestions for where to put up posters:

- Local Markets
- Supermarkets
- School Notice Boards
- Parish Notice Boards
- Leisure Centres
- Shops
- Nurseries
- Restaurants
- Pubs
- Cafes
- Town Halls
- At work
- Libraries
- Community Centres

Plugged In Contact Details and links:

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Twitter: www.twitter.com/itspluggedin