



THE ARTS IN THE DNA OF VALLEYS KIDS

AN OVERVIEW BY DENISE LORD



CREATIVITY
ENGAGEMENT
WELSH LANGUAGE
CLIMATE JUSTICE
NURTURING TALENT
TRANSFORMATION

THE BEGINNING

Way back in the 1980's the Arts were written into the DNA of the charity. This is when Valleys Kids was Penygraig Community Project, but known locally as The Bike Club. (because messing about with bikes was a compelling reason for youngsters in trouble with the police to enjoy staying out of trouble, by fixing up and riding bikes).

Touring productions and participatory theatre played an equally important role in engaging with the local community. Remember, the 80s was the decade defined by pit closures and picket lines with huge social unrest and deep poverty, impacting on all the families in these Valleys.





Soar Centre was rescued from certain dereliction by the vision and tenacity of Margaret, Richard (fresh from Liverpool 8- another area of huge deprivation) and Howell Edwards (local Probation Officer) and the generosity of Mrs. Rhiannon Parry (a formidable force of nature on the Soar Chapel committee) who ensured the building was gifted to them for the benefit of the community.

The fixed wooden pews were not the most comfortable in the world, but the large hall stripped of its imposing pulpit and organ (safely rehoused) was a perfect versatile playground for all age groups in the community: inflatables, ball games, craft fayres, tea dances, community bingo and the Arts in all their manifestations.

Soar Centre became an attractive venue for local people to attend high quality, professional touring productions on their doorstep, in an area devoid of Arts and cultural facilities, it would have been prohibitively expensive for families to access shows in Pontypridd, Treorchy or Cardiff,

The history of hosting UK wide companies in Soar Centre, began with Red Ladder – a radical agitprop theatre company that started in an era of riots, demonstrations and revolts, committed to social change and global justice starring the late Brian Hibbard, who would go on to play a significant role in future initiatives).

Appositely, they had to perform in the Labour Club across the road because Soar wasn't quite finished. But, of course, the show must go on...



1987 ONWARDS

Soar went on to host touring shows on a regular basis, beginning with a Wales' ground breaking, multi-media company Moving Being Production of The Rising – Yr Gwyrthrufel (a bilingual adaptation from Gwyn Alf Williams book) written by the late, great Welsh writer Sion Eirion and Alan Osborne and directed by Geoff Moore. Over the years, audiences grew in numbers and in their enjoyment of seeing professional and amateur shows without having to catch a bus or rob a bank.

Of course, seeing and enjoying it created an appetite for doing it. The Penygraig Community Project pantomime became an annual highlight in the Arts calendar involving the whole community from toddlers to pensioners. Everyone got stuck in: building and painting sets, sewing costumes, make-up, writing, lighting, directing, marketing and finally a cast of thousands (small exaggeration) performing.

Strong links were developed between the local TIE company, Spectacle Theatre, based in Porth and, when funding allowed, junior and youth drama workshops were delivered by freelance artworkers. This was the seed of Sparc.

1999 onwards

Moving forwards, Valleys Kids harnessed the power of the Arts to deliver 'out of the ordinary' transformational initiatives, over and above our regular core work. The ethos was one of engaging the disengaged and the disenfranchised both young and old in creative and imaginative ways. Not all children and young people wanted to act or perform. Our challenge was to explore other means by which to draw them in and broaden their horizons.

We were successful in developing profitable relationships with key businesses who provided sponsorship, which was increased by the contribution of match funding from Arts & Business Cymru, whose purpose was to persuade corporates of the power of the Arts. This gave rise to a plethora of CREATIVITY embracing: films, exhibitions, craft workshops, visual arts, which served to NURTURE TALENT through unique participatory experiences and ENGAGED disadvantaged children, young people and adults. All this, whilst raising the profile of our work, enhancing the reputation of business and their staffs' ENGAGEMENT in their local community and promoting sustainability.

The following initiatives were beneficiaries of corporate sponsorship incentivised by Arts & Business Cymru:

Safe House

A film set on the Mount Libanus Estate devised and starring the youth group in the Penyrennglyn Project and a chinchilla (unfortunately, we couldn't source an aardvark), nurtured and encouraged by Youth Worker Christian Perry. It written by Boyd Clack (High Hopes / Satellite City) giving local young people with no experience of performance or film, an exciting opportunity to work with professional filmmakers, alongside guest professional Welsh actors: Brian Hibbard, Rhodri Huw, Eiry Thomas. It was made possible by Barclays Bank and Arts & Business funding and a winner of Arts & Business Award.

The relationship with Barclays sparked many more opportunities.





The Magic Box.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CcNqvHTu6Q>

The Magic Box film, written by Larry Allan, to celebrate the magic of play and the generosity of Hutchings HQ, (they donated a Vauxhall Movena Van to help Valleys Kids deliver play sessions to isolated Valleys communities - Chairman John Hutchings and his son Steve, Managing Director both took part) it won an Arts & Business Cymru Award. The Project gave children from Penygraig Afterschool Club and their Play Workers a chance to perform and work with professional film-makers, actor and sports star.



Not Ready for Drowning

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gz0Gi_peUrw

A documentary film made in 2001 by young people from the Mount Libanus Estate, Penyrenghlyn documenting the TRANSFORMATION of a Rhondda Valley community from despair to hope, from diabolical to desirable. It was devised and filmed (in the wettest half term on record) by the young people who were given free rein in choice of subject matter, led by professional film-maker Wyn Mason supported by the Film Council's First Light funding. It's clear that what mattered to the young people, was giving their community a voice and shining a light on the challenges they faced. It remains a superb snapshot in time of a sink estate on the brink of change.

Dream it Build it 2007-- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUYqDXM7swA>

An award winning music video ENGAGING Penygraig junior drama group and young people from Rhydfelin along with builders from Knox and Wells undertaking Soar refurbishment, starring Flying Picket/actor, Brian Hibbard and actor Russ Gomer, with words by writer Larry Allan and music by Rob Smith, sound recorded at RWCMD. (This video marked the 2nd refurbishment of Soar Centre £2.4 million), to create a state of the Art, versatile, accessible venue. The film gave young people an opportunity to perform and builders the chance to dance like Pan's People, under the direction of professional director, Geoff Moore and a professional choreographer. It was made possible thanks to the generosity of Knox and Wells who took on the makeover of Little Bryn Gwyn Residential Centre on Gower and their 'in kind' support was matched by Arts and Business Cymru.



Roots and Branches

A series of creative workshops for children from four Valleys Kids Centres: Penygraig, Penyreglyn, Dinas and Rhydyfelin led by Community Artist, Anne Culverhouse Evans, on the theme of Roots and Branches was made possible with sponsorship from Atradius and matched by Arts & Business Cymru. This project gave children an opportunity to explore themselves in visual arts in relation to their local environment, expressing their sense of identity, forged by their surroundings.

A public auction of the art produced, was held in Atradius in Cardiff Bay for an invited audience.

The auctioneer was the ubiquitous Brian Hibbard, bringing a professional flare to the event, which saw young people from some of the most deprived areas of the Valleys feel a huge sense of pride and accomplishment in the paintings produced, which were framed and sold to raise funding to sustain their centres. Four sumptuously painted silk banners remain, (postcards printed too) created by children and adults from all four community hubs, celebrating 30 years of Valleys Kids' CREATIVITY.



Comic Relief – Rethinking Drinking 2013

We injected CREATIVITY into a discrete project supported by Comic Relief aimed at ENGAGING vulnerable young people, raising awareness of the dangers of drink. A short film was shot, devised and written by our young people 'This Shouldn't Have to Happen' a hard-hitting film, in partnership with ProAct UK...It culminated in 'Rethinking Drinking Conference' held in Soar Centre, Penygraig involving children from all Valleys Kids' Centres, Rhyfyfelin Flight Wings group staged a piece of Forum Theatre exploring negative peer pressures around drink. Everyone took part in a range of workshop sessions run by the Police, Fire Service and Taff Ely Drug Support. Alongside workshops and fun activities, using beer goggles and an obstacle course, we ran design workshops, led by Anne Culverhouse Evans, for young people creating beer mats and slogans warning of the dangers of drinking.

Poetry & Art – Hugh James Solicitors, Sunjuice, GE Aviation

Christmas always offers lots of opportunity to enable children to have fun making stuff. The Valleys Kids Calendar provided an annual tool for participatory CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT, marrying the messages of key local businesses with the drawings and poems made by children in each Centre, these initiatives were led by Anne Culverhouse Evans alongside, Youth and Play Workers. Over a number of years, we designed desk calendars, and Christmas card designs in partnership with a sponsor, which was sent to all our contacts, stakeholders, supporters. It combined the work of Valleys Kids' children and young people and the brand /messages of the particular business. This reflects not only a level of innovative entrepreneurship using the Arts as the means to engage both business and children, raising awareness of our work, but one year led to an unexpected £58,000 legacy through a local solicitor in receipt of one of our calendars, contributing to sustainability.



Mission Incredible Digital Awards –Following the success of ‘Safe House’ we conceived a spoof film awards ceremony in which, of course ‘Safe House’ would be the winner in every category. Children and young people from the Penyreglyn Project led by Youth Worker Christian Perry created a series of hilarious ‘spoof trailers’ in which they starred: Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, Thriller. It was a high-profile event in which the children were the creators of the film content and took part as ushers at the event, which was significant as a means of giving disadvantaged young people a prestigious stage, promoting a sense of achievement and self-worth. Traditionally it was a challenge to get Cardiff based organisations to make their way to our centres in the Valleys.

So the event took place in the Coal Exchange in Cardiff – businesses were invited to buy a table with 3 course meal and sponsor a category (emulating the BAFTAs). Nicola Heyward Thomas was the MC. Major businesses involved: Arriva Trains Wales, Welsh Water, BBC Wales, Hugh James Solicitors, The Western Mail, Buy as you View. New skills were learned, talents honed, a sense of pride inculcated; young people from a disadvantaged community gained a new sense of themselves and what they were capable of.

Mission Incredible Game MIG– not to let a good theme die in the spirit of CREATIVITY and innovation. We commissioned MIG, a web based animated game, with children drawn in the style of Quentin Blake, which followed a Rainbow double decker Play bus (we had a real one thanks to Buy as you View) to all VK Centres: starting in Penyreglyn, Penygraig, Dinas, Rhydfelin to the Coal Exchange in Cardiff Bay. The aim of the game was to capture children onto the bus and take them to the Coal Exchange winners’ ceremony, where they received keys for children on the bus from the Valleys to stay at Little Bryn Gwyn, VK Residential Centre on the Gower. Children in each Centre helped to inform the design on the activities in each Centre. Eg. Penygraig’s took place in Mr. Creemy’s ice cream shop splatting cones.

Hundreds of children (and adults) played the game, which had a public scoreboard so they could compete with anyone in the world. The game aimed to entertain and engage children & young people whilst inculcating a sense of achievement and raising awareness of VK work.



Dinas Mission Incredible digital media project – sponsored by Barclays, children aged 5 – 9 years worked with a professional team of animators making flash animation movies which led to a short animation called Off the Wall. Kyle and Ryan Stead were participants, who have since excelled in the professional Arts world in RCT.

A CD Rom was produced featuring the films and the game

Dinas Raptiles - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3f4TUIWZB8>

Clayton Georges, Cardiff based rapper, led rap workshops with young people from Dinas Project. The Dinas Raptiles were joined by intrepid staff from Hutchings Vauxhall and RCT Homes along with members of the community and the Mzansi Cymru choir and Cardiff City Mascot, Bartley. Note Kyle & Ryan Stead were key players.

Christmas Haiku – A creative writing newsletter

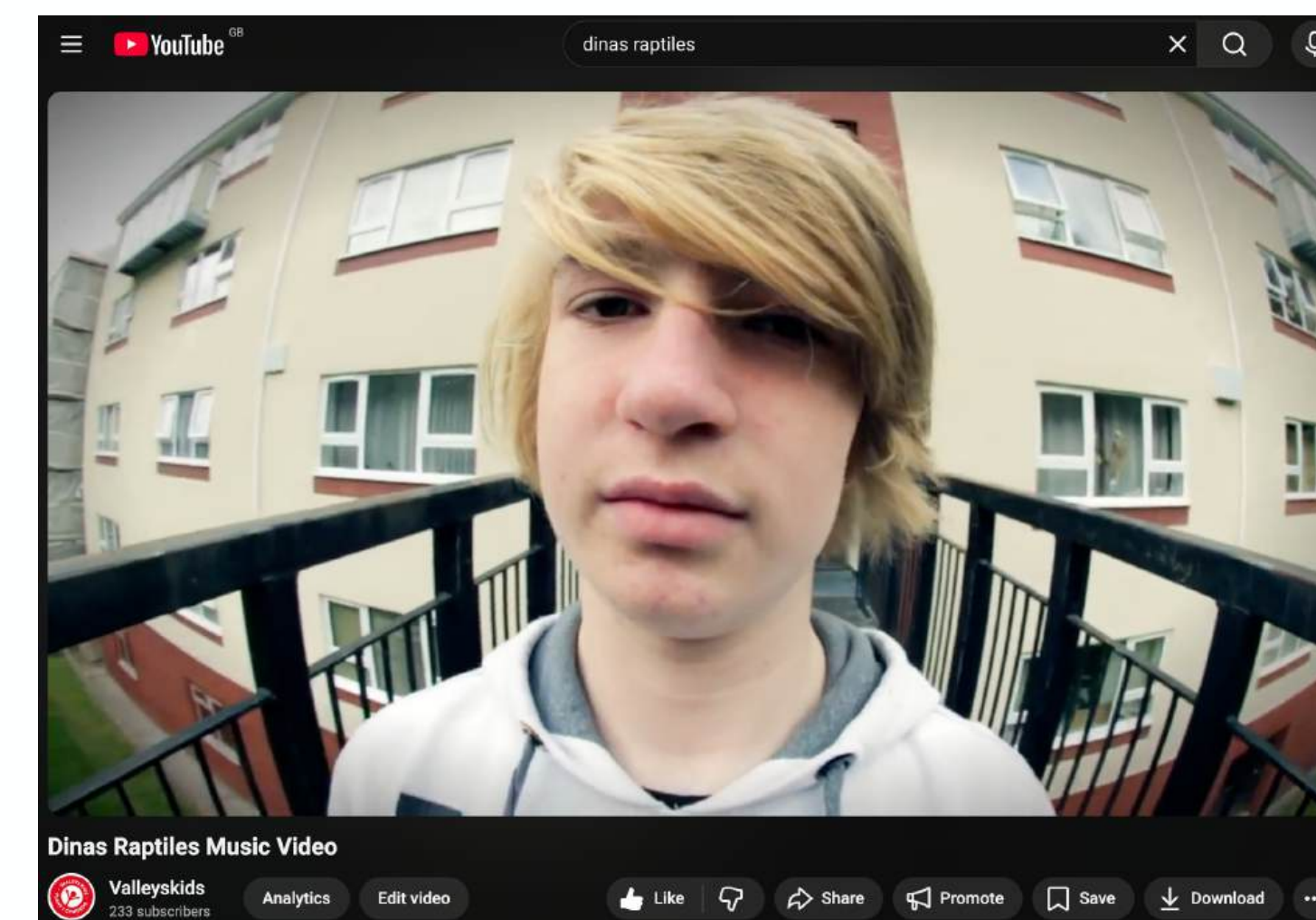
A festive journey

To the heart of Valleys Kids

Evoking warm thoughts

The Christmas Newsletter in 2006 took a Japanese turn when we invited Larry Allan to run writing workshops across Valleys Kids Centres. He worked with five groups in four centres: the Lilac Ladies in Penyrenlyn older adults intent on keeping fit and the over 60s Knit and Natter; Middle Club children in Dinas (including Kyle and Ryan Stead).

The Feel Good group in Soar Centre set up by the late Liz Cutland intent on alleviating stress and promoting mental health amongst vulnerable older adults. And Sparc Youth Theatre Group in Rhydyfelin



UBUNTU PROJECT

“ I am what I am,
because of who
we all are.”

This Project aimed to broaden horizons, break down cultural barriers and overcome racial prejudice, which was prevalent in predominantly white Valleys communities, enabling our children to learn that people should not be judged by their skin colour or country of origin.

Denise Lord – Development Co-ordinator played tenor saxophone in Wonderbrass and encountered Amampondo at Brecon Jazz and a seed was sown.

Amampondo – Nelson Mandela’s favourite traditional Xhosa percussion band from Langa Township, Cape Town taught Valleys Kids’ young people African song, drumming and dance with support from Barclays & Arts & Business Cymru. The event combined Rhondda rugby U15s team with Valleys Kids’ children, learning Shoshaloza and African drumming routines to perform to invited guests, celebrating the official opening of LBG.

Wales for Africa – Welsh Government Gold Star Linking Programme

This initiative led to Valleys Kids becoming part of the Welsh Government – Gold Star Linking Programme ‘Wales for Africa’ committed to the Millennium Development Goals with the aim of sharing expertise and establishing best practice models to roll out throughout the United Nations. Many partnerships were based on health or education. VK was unique in focussing on young people and the Arts.

Cross cultural celebration at the Opening of Soar Centre - June 2006

Amampondo return to Wales to refresh the African singing and drumming with Valleys Kids young people from each Centre performing to celebrate the opening of refurbished Soar Centre, Penygraig with Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s endorsement: African Diamonds and Welsh Gold.

UBUNTU https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1M_2JYhNDrc

South African Art at the heart of Welsh Rugby – November 2007

On the strength of our innovative South African connections, WRU and Prince William invite 30 Valleys Kids’ young people and Amampondo to perform before the game at the Millennium Stadium and on the pitch for the inauguration of the Prince William Cup rugby match Wales v South Africa. HRH Prince William met the band and the children, providing all of them with memories of a lifetime.

Artistic Royal Visit May 2008

The rugby encounter resulted in a visit from HRH Prince William to Valleys Kids’ Dinas and Penygraig Centres. This was his first official visit to Wales. In the Dinas Project he took part in a silk painting workshop, alongside Dinas children, led by Anne Culverhouse Evans. (He painted a silk dragon.)

MZANSI CYMRU – THE VISION 2008

These life and art enhancing cross-cultural collaborations between Townships and Valleys, prompted one of Valleys Kids' most ambitious international initiatives yet.

It's aim: to bring two communities together, each with a history of struggle and strength, both suffering high levels of poverty and deprivation, both teeming with untapped talent, to develop an ongoing cultural exchange between African and Welsh children & young people and adults to benefit individuals in both communities.

Nelson Mandela's words were very much at the forefront

“It always seems impossible until it is done.”

This four year long project, which engaged thousands of participants, was funded as part of Wales' Cultural Olympiad and London 2012 Festival. This remarkable project changed the lives of disadvantaged individuals in both communities, through engaging them in the Arts and educating a new generation on the injustice of apartheid. It enabled us to create a genuine cultural exchange bringing over 50 performers from Cape Town from: Fezeka Choir, Dance for All, Zip Zap Circus, Actors and Amampondo in July 2012 and taking 54 people from the Valleys to Cape Town in November 2012

Its genius lay in the writer, Laurence Allan's concept of a moving and inspirational story of a Zulu girl, Thembesile and a Welsh boy, Gerwyn who meet and fall in love on the film set of Zulu in Kwa Zulu Natal in 1964 at exactly the same time, that history is being made, as Nelson Mandela is given a life sentence on Robbin Island. Their lives are ripped apart by the brutality of the apartheid regime, she is thrown in prison, he is deported. She finds she is carrying his child. He doesn't know. They never forget each other and 40 years later, at the London Olympics in 2012, fate is ready to play its hand. It was a perfect crucible to meld diverse art forms, drama, music, song, circus, puppetry and dance and engage hundreds of participants of all ages and abilities to explore their talents.

Mzansi Cymru Project culminated in two spectacular cross-cultural performances, 'Torchbearers' in 2012, featuring 180 performers from Wales and South Africa. Its journey over four years engaged non-performers in: art, writing, poetry, photography; exploring themes of love, community, individual & cultural identity, freedom, forgiveness, racism and social justice.

The following are a selection of highlights from a rich artistic journey, all of which facilitated CREATIVITY in all its forms, delivered ENGAGEMENT in spades, NURTURED a myriad of talents, explored CLIMATE JUSTICE and celebrated the Valleys' brand of WELSH LANGUAGE & CULTURAL IDENTITY

Community Arts Roadshows

Over the first 2 years, a diverse series of taster workshops and showcases, embracing: photography, writing, rapping, Zulu stick fighting and art took place in schools, colleges & community centres led by professional team: Writer/Director, Laurence Allan; Paula Gardiner, Musical Director, Photojournalist, Glenn Edwards; Designer, Mary Drummond; Creative Director, Phil MacKenzie and Valleys Kids' Artist in Residence, Anne Culverhouse Evans along with a host of freelance professionals from all disciplines.

The aim was to recruit: A choir, a musical ensemble, a dance troupe, a circus troupe, a diverse cohort of performers and an army of makers and helpers to join with South African partners in the final culmination. Parallel work involving visits by the professional team to Cape Town identifying possible partners and seeding the creative ideas continued through the duration of the project.

The aims of Mzansi Cymru <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlejzGORhNM>

The Mzansi Cymru Project Community Choir is born February 2009

Led by many freelance choir leaders, including Nick Wayland Evans and Ross Leadbeater from Only Men Aloud. An intergenerational choir of mixed ability singers began to gather momentum, most of whom could not read music but learned to sing South African and Welsh songs. Kyle and Ryan Stead from Dinas became stalwart members. This choir formed the backbone of the project and enhanced showcases and workshop activities going forward.

Operation Zulu 1st Showcase - July 2009

Written and directed by Larry Allan and with music by Paula Gardiner@ The Factory in Porth hosted by BBC Wales' Roy Noble OBE. Professional Actors: Suzanne Packer and Nathan Sussex work with Rhydyfelin Youth Theatre and the Choir giving community members a rare opportunity to work alongside professionals.

Art@the Senedd Jan 2010 – A Torchbearers showcase

An opportunity for our young performers and choir to perform at an Arts & Business event sponsored by Legal & General, in a prestigious setting in Cardiff, African hangings created during Rhondda schools workshops led by Anne Culverhouse-Evans were displayed, children and teachers from the schools attended.

The Trashion Show - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzQ7D4MJuml>

An intergenerational project bringing Rhondda school children and older adults from Valleys Kids Centres together in a spectacular showcase performance in Soar Centre took part in design workshops led by Designer, Mary Drummond, to explore environmental issues and global climate change. The themes were: Earth, Fire, Wind, Water, and Heart. They used rubbish and recycled materials to make spectacular catwalk costumes, seeding some of the design ideas and recruiting volunteers for the final production. Filmed by Like and Egg with photography by Glenn Edwards.

Love is Colourblind - June 2010- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quENn67cfMk>

Young people from Rhondda Cynon Taff inclusive 'Take pART' Performance Crew wrote the lyrics in workshops led by writer, Larry Allan and composer, Gwyncy Jones to create this song, inspired by the themes of Mzansi Cymru. It was performed in the Muni Arts Centre, Pontypridd.

Symfoni in a Day - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1wj0T7visw>

The World's Most Extraordinary Ensemble led by Composer & Musical Director, Paula Gardiner. She created a succinct Symffoni one Sunday morning in Soar Centre, Penygraig, with a mix of musicians and singers as part of the London 2012 Open Weekend Challenge in 2010.

RCT Community Arts – The Muni Showcase Performance

200 children and young people aged 7 – 18 years from RCT Community Arts Groups: Expressions, Connections, True Colours and Making Moves with choreography by Louise Prosser & Dancers; Julie Evans & Dancers took part in dance workshops exploring the industrial history of the South Wales Valleys and the Mzansi story performed at the Muni to packed audiences.

World Premier of Symphony Z December 2010

Performed in Soar Centre despite the snow. A culmination of the burgeoning score, composed by Paula Gardiner featuring our growing Extraordinary Ensemble and Choir, with the Llantrisant Wind Band, and special guest South African stratospheric trumpeter, Claude Deppa.

Life on Robben Island – May 2011

Larry Allan wrote a script and collaborated with Sarah Beer from Disability Arts Cymru and the Unusual Stage School to create a showcase performance in the Unity Festival, Wales Millennium Centre featuring a cast of disabled and neuro-diverse performers from the Valleys and Cardiff supported by the Choir and members of Extraordinary Ensemble.

Mzansi Cymru Hand Project - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pr6xPjMYGX0>

Designer Mary Drummond led art workshops for children from 4 Primary schools at Cardinal Newman RC School as part of a Mzansi Cymru transition day. She used the Mzansi Cymru, South African and Welsh Hand logo as inspiration to create hundreds of decorated hands that formed part of a large scale piece of art linking South African communities with the South Wales Valleys

The Art of Dignity July 2011—Opening of The Factory by First Minister Carwyn Jones

Welsh and African inspired Art Exhibition, following seed workshops by writer Larry Allan and photographer, Glenn Edwards – a range of art was created by young people in workshops led by Valleys Kids' Anne Culverhouse Evans in Rhondda schools and in VK Centres in Penygraig, Penynglyn, & Rhydyfelin and Paul Lavagna with Art & Design students in Coleg y Cymoedd – the work was displayed in Art in the Attic Gallery the event was supported by the Mzansi Cymru Choir.

Torchbearers in Cape Town - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=thHdk9xWZqs>

Creative Team visit Cape Town to work with South African Partners: Fezeka Choir, Dance for All, Zip Zap Circus, Amampondo & actors culminating in public showcase performance in Zip Zap Dome – September 2011

Photo-journalist Glenn Edwards captured both the Welsh and South African journey from inception to culmination, under his wing, three students from Cardiff University Photography Degree each undertake projects in Cape Town and the Valleys.

Positive Feeling Flash Mob - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zb_SxOr7ioQ

Filmed by Like an Egg on 3rd December 2011 in the foyer of the WMC following weeks of dance workshops across the Valleys and Cardiff co-ordinated by Denise Lord, choreographed and led by Natalie Spiteri with a montage sound track by Like an Egg, the event featuring the Mzansi Cymru choir, along with a group of break dancers led by Slammo from Elemental Force; it brought ordinary people and performers, young and old, together learning to dance in a feel-good event promoting Torchbearers production.

Artists and Artisans – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnEbf9i6LAK>

Visual Voice project 'Artists & Artisans' led by Award winning photojournalist, Glenn Edwards and radio producer, Steve Groves. with investment from Arts & Business Cymru Culture Step interviewed performers and sponsors during final Torchbearers rehearsals in a huge industrial unit in Pontypridd thanks to pro bono support of Knox & Wells construction who built a mock-up of the Donald Gordon stage. This was crucial particularly for Wales based Organised Kaos Circus and the South African Zip Zap Circus who needed height and space for aerial work intrinsic to the show.

Giant Puppets: Nelson Mandela & Stanley Baker 6 metres tall – Jan - April 2012

Mary Drummond led community puppet making workshops, appropriately, Stanley was made in Ferndale Youth Centre and Nelson in Splott Communities First Centre. A creative way of engaging with participants who did not welcome the spotlight of performance

These characters feature in Torchbearers and played a part in a 2nd Flash Mob event in conjunction with BBC Big Screen on the Hayes Cardiff. Then Stanley and Nelson had the privilege of meeting the Olympic Torch Relay along with children from the Centres, in Pontypridd and Treherbert respectively.

WMC Torchbearers Trailer with Rhod Gilbert <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7BweGgVCjrk>

BBC Wales made a 2 part 30' documentary of the making of Torchbearers and of the final show.

Photo-journalist Glenn Edwards captured the journey from inception to culmination which is in a book, called 'Torchbearers'.

The Creative Director, Phil MacKenzie summarised the project

“A kaleidoscopic fusion of Welsh, African, young, old, actor, musician professional and amateur. Sometimes all in the same room or on the same stage at the same time. All working in harmony and with immense generosity towards each other in creating a meaningful experience for its audience in 2 very different countries on 2 very different stages.

It is the ACTION of this disparate group of people all agreeing and doing something (almost impossible) together that I carry with me. Each individual offering their own unique quality to the whole. It is from this 'doing together' in pursuit of excellence that the cultural exchange/meeting grew in resonance, confidence and meaning. It is this that profoundly bonds and unites. It is this challenging yet celebratory experience and memory that both young and old will carry back to their respective countries and in doing so further nurture their own lives and cultures.”

A special Torchbearers Promo video for Welsh Rugby Fans

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wX36P3ICWbE>



Rhondda Lives – in both senses of the word Lives

This 3 year CREATIVE project aimed to engage older individuals in the community using personal photographs as a catalyst for unearthing memories and giving people the skills and confidence to create compelling stories of their lives in their own voice. The rich diversity of digital stories, which Katrina Kirkwood the Project Co-ordinator achieved is a testament to unique history of the Rhondda and her ability to ENGAGE with ordinary people to help them tell their extraordinary stories.

Cadw Project. - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IR4WVeJWDLE>

As part of Heritage Lottery funded Unloved Heritage Project, young people from Valleys Kids' Penyrennglyn Project, in Treherbert, collaborated with young people from Dyffryn Nantlle, Gwynedd exploring, learning and interpreting their heritage of coal mining site of Fernhill Colliery in the South and slate mining sites in Dyffryn Nantlle in North Wales. The young people have developed their technological skills and received training in virtual and augmented reality, finally designing an App portraying their heritage.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2if6mOdGA8>

Penyrennglyn Youth “Working with other projects across Wales, we met lots of new people from completely different backgrounds. Our group in particular, got on well with the Dyffryn Nantlle group from North Wales. It was really nice to go and visit their project. Both our projects are very similar, using technology to educate and inform people about their local history. While we recreated the Fernhill site into the world of Minecraft, the North Wales group developed an App that can be used live at the former Dorothea Quarry, to guide you around the site.”

Ideas People and Places 2014 Chosen to be one of the projects taking part in Arts Council of Wales initiative: Ideas, People & Places in partnership with Artes Mundi created unusual opportunities for ordinary people to explore their sense of place and discover new ways to experience Art.....etcetcetc



2015 The Art in the Attic Gallery –was given a new lease of ‘accessible’ life and an upgrade thanks to a capital grant from The Colwinston Trust and Knox & Wells construction company, who provided pro bono support. We secured ongoing revenue funding from Colwinston to appoint Anne Culverhouse Evans as Artist in Residence. In her role, Anne has forged prestigious partnerships with Arts organisations including the Royal Academy of Art, Artis Mundi, Tate Exchange, etcetcetc

Anne Culverhouse Evans is a uniquely talented, socially engaged artist with a rare capacity to engage with ordinary people who believe they have no scrap of artistic ability to create art that they are proud of.

This video is one small insight into her remarkable work during one of the most challenging times.

Lockdown Art - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHwDs1RFkew>

There are many many more.....

the FACTORY

The Factory – a place where magic happens

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOQ3LRpivRE>

Valleys Kids now own the iconic Thomas & Evans Welsh Hills Works building in Porth which was officially launched as The Factory by First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones in 2014.

It is a unique hub, centrally placed with versatile spaces and state of the art technology serving the needs of both professional, amateur, diverse performance and participatory arts activities. The building needs investment to fulfil its huge potential to continue to facilitate transformational arts.



MZANSI CYMRU LEGACY - AFTERTHOUGHTS

More than a Song Community Choir

The Mzansi Cymru Community Choir continues to thrive 14 years after the first taster sessions, following the extraordinary experiences in Wales and South Africa. Now known as More than a Song (a nod to one of the songs in the show) it is led by one of the original participants, Amy Jenkins, who has grown in skills and confidence and become a sought after freelance professional choir leader. A mixed choir of over 30 members, many of whom are the original members meets every week in The Factory in Porth. The sessions contribute to the mental health and wellbeing of many older members of the local community. It performs regularly locally and nationally. Gigs are planned in Libraries in RCT in the short term, with a collaboration with a Cornish choir at the Eden Project planned in October 2023.

The Extraordinary Ensemble

Some of the older musicians that were gathered over the 4 year Mzansi journey have gained confidence to continue their musical journey which they would not have thought possible pre the project. Septugenerians Paul (guitar) and Anne Hughes (concertina) are intrinsic to the Choir providing accompaniment at weekly sessions. They are members of a number of local bands alongside several other musicians who honed their talents within Mzansi.

ChainWorks Productions

Denise Lord and Laurence Allan set up ChainWorks Productions as charity in 2014 with the support and encouragement of Valleys Kids. The Factory was offered as a pro bono base. Anne Culverhouse Evans, Artist in Residence supported design elements of productions. Members of More than a Song Community Choir and Music Ensemble were Trustees along with then Factory Manager, now VK CEO, Elise Stewart.

<http://chainworksproductions.co.uk/who/>

This initiative relates directly to Larry's experience of the Mzansi Cymru Project, in which he had a role as conceptualiser and writer bringing the project to fruition as the artistic director. The ethos of creative collaboration linking the local with the global was central to the vision of ChainWorks Productions.

ChainWorks would not have been possible without Valleys Kids support and over a period of 5 years provided a wealth of creative opportunities for professional and amateur artists.

The productions written by Larry Allan nurtured young talent, in particular, three Valleys Kids' individuals have benefitted from their involvement: Kyle & Ryan Stead and Hannah Lloyd were part of 5 productions. More than Just a Game, Gimme Some Truth, Rainbow Chaser and A&B and Otley Brewery sponsored, Tom Jones' Sofa on Tour to pubs in RCT and in The Factory. The combined springboard of Sparc, Valleys Kids' Youth Workers and ChainWorks provided a strong platform which helped them launch Off Ya Trolley Productions. All are forging creative professional careers and creating opportunities for their peers within their communities and

<http://chainworksproductions.co.uk>

ChainWorks folded in 2019. However, the relationship between Kyle, Ryan and Hannah and Larry Allan came full circle in November 2022, when they commissioned him to write a piece as part of the Welsh Football Association's World Cup Festival of Football. He wrote and directed Football Crazy in which all three performed to a full house at the Factory, Porth.