

Sharing responsibility

Steve, can you tell us

what Black Country Touring is all about?

Black Country Touring

is an arts organisation

that works in the Black Country,

and we do a lot of work

with local communities

where we take professional

touring theatre from around the country

into community-run venues,

and we also create work

with people in the Black Country,

which is then mounted by professionals.

How do you make that work?

I think that the thing we know works

is listening to our promoters.

If we can get them to genuinely

buy into something,

if we can get them genuinely to want

to be part of what we are doing,

they will bring people with them

because they have the contacts.

As outsiders in communities,

which you nearly always are,

apart from your own community,

you can know a lot about

community development,
but it doesn't mean you know how to get
people from that community
to participate in what you are doing.
Whoever that promoter is
in the community, they will decide on who
their audience is because they know their audience.

We're not trying to prejudge
who their audience is
because they know their audience,
they make the decisions.

Most of that audience, about 70% of it,
will come because of the word of mouth.

It doesn't matter how many posters we put up,
it doesn't matter how many brochures
the Black Country Touring print
or how many flyers go out.

In the end people come because
somebody has told them it's happening.

And those local groups
and promoters you work with,
how much responsibility do they take
for the success of the show?

They have to take all responsibility.

I mean, the best model, example of it,
is our young promoters,
and we are going to secondary schools,

generally the show will be booked
by the English teacher,
who would book something
that they thought was suitable
for people to watch,
but they don't have any direct access
to the local community,
they have direct access to their pupils.

So what would happen,
would be we would get 30 kids
sitting in the front row,
who generally were the last class
that teacher was teaching that day,
who'd been bullied into coming back
and seeing the show.

So, we went to a couple of them
and said, what we suggest is,
instead of carrying on this model,
you get together a group of kids
who were interested in shows,
and were interested in promotion and things,
then, we will come to them,
and we will ask them what show they want.

They can choose who their target audience is,
we'll rely on them to do
the selling of the tickets,
we'll rely on them to do the marketing,

we'll devise a programme
so that they can go through
the whole process of promoting the show.
And in the end, what happened was
that when we did that,
the profile of the audience changed as well,
because the young people, generally,
didn't want a programme just for the young people,
which we thought they'd want to do.
They wanted a programme for the community.
So then they started bringing in
their aunties, uncles,
mum, dad, next-door-neighbour...
So we started to get
a completely different profile
of people coming to see the shows.