

**Birds of Paradise Theatre Company
presents...**

Agent for Change

Information Pack

The **Agent for Change** programme is set to investigate why disabled practitioners are rarely seen in mainstream theatre productions. We aim to realise actual and lasting change at all stages in the process towards becoming fully included professionals: from inspiring young people, enabling their access to training and widening employment opportunities for all disabled actors.

We need to know about your experiences of addressing inclusion within your organisation. We want to know what would have helped you to overcome difficulties and what could be done in the future to clear the way for disabled performers and theatre practitioners.



**BIRDS OF
PARADISE
THEATRE
COMPANY**

We're interested in the specifics as well as the wider issues. The project, from its inception, has been designed to be responsive to the needs of the sector—we're not here to preach or bang you on the head with rights and wrongs.

Detailed information about the project is given on the following pages but if you have any questions or comments, please get in touch. We're looking to get the ball rolling by meeting with individuals and organisations to open up the discussion—to set up a meeting, drop me a line.

Agent for Change is sponsored by:



Scottish
Arts Council



**Robert Softley
Agent for Change
Birds of Paradise Theatre Company**

333 Woodlands Road, Glasgow, G3 6NG

**t: 0141 339 1155 f: 0141 339 1177
e: robert@birdsofparadisetheatre.co.uk
w: www.birdsofparadisetheatre.co.uk**

The **aims** of the **Agent for Change** programme are bold and adventurous and are intended to address the core problems preventing inclusion from becoming a reality in Scottish theatre. We aim to;

- spread our knowledge and experience across the arts and other community sectors
- visibly campaign on the importance of diversity on stage, challenging centuries of stereo-typing of disabled people
- demonstrate creative methods of providing training and engaging in debate
- raise the profile of arts and disability with audiences and practitioners
- develop current thinking and influence policy within both local organisations and national agencies
- be torchbearers of inclusion in the arts, and therefore, society at large

So how are we going to achieve this?

Agent for Change Post

The Agent for Change will act as a liaison figure for theatre companies, performing arts' education providers and other arts organisations that are looking to adopt inclusive practises as well as influencing policy and public opinion.

As well as coordinating the whole Agent for Change programme, Robert Softley will be primarily responsible for researching and devising a radically revised disability equality opportunities package (outlined below).

He will be responsible for delivering the package to other organisations and co-ordinating the first Agent for Change Event and Politics of Disability marketing campaign.

Active Equality Learning

Birds of Paradise want to develop a radically different training programme designed to affect real change and evoke full engagement from its participants.

Active Equality Learning will provide a spectrum of learning opportunities using participatory drama techniques to engage participants in critical thinking about equalities issues whether at an introductory or advanced level. The content of these sessions will

address discrimination against all those whose human rights have been infringed but with particular emphasis on disabled people.

Once **AEL** has been set in motion it will be made available, free of charge, to those in theatre and arts organisations. Initial enquiries have shown that companies such as TAG, 7:84, Theatre Cryptic, Suspect Culture, Visible Fictions and the Scottish Youth Theatre would all be potentially interested in AEL.

Clearly, reversing hundreds of years of discrimination against disabled people is not simply a case of completing a training course and the discrimination disappearing. **AEL** has to be an on-going process over the long term to affect real change—the Agent for Change programme aims to start that process.

Agent for Change Event

Inspired by the theory and practice of Popular Education, the event will be participatory, problem solving and creative and will allow all present to feel included and stimulated. The event aims to pose questions, look for solutions and involve those present in creating answers.

This year it will focus on access to Performing Arts courses for young disabled people. It will be aimed primarily at Further Education lecturers who run Performing Arts Courses, but will also be relevant for secondary school teachers and those involved in other theatre/drama provision. It will question access for disabled students to these courses, but more importantly the day will produce useful answers that will move training providers towards widening access. Early discussions have begun with the RSAMD about their participation.

The Politics of Disability

In order to challenge the many existing preconceptions about beauty, the performer and the aesthetic of disabled people, the Agent for Change programme will undertake a strategic, non-production based marketing campaign to promote positive role models of disabled actors. This will target general audiences and theatre, film and television makers, aiming to alter both preconceptions and policies. The Agent for Change will be responsible for researching and overseeing this campaign.

If you're interested in any of these elements of the programme then please get in touch with Robert at the above number.