



## **National Lottery funding supports the UK roll-out of The Agency, a unique creative programme for young entrepreneurs**

### **National Theatre Wales and FabLab Belfast join lead partners, Battersea Arts Centre, Contact and People's Palace Projects, to run The Agency in 4 locations across the UK**

The Agency – a creative entrepreneurship programme that supports young people to make their ideas a reality – has secured just over £873,000 of National Lottery funding from the Big Lottery Fund to support its national roll-out over the next three years.

National Theatre Wales and FabLab Belfast will now join forces with lead partners Battersea Arts Centre, Contact, Manchester and People's Palace Projects to double the footprint of The Agency across the UK from September 2018, working with more young people than ever before.

Recent research has confirmed that low-income families and young people across the UK are still struggling to recover from the financial crisis <sup>1\*</sup>. Of the more than half a million 16-24 year olds who are unemployed, it is the young people from underserved areas across the country who are hardest hit.

The Agency specifically seeks out young people in some of these communities. It is unique amongst other training or skills development programmes because it combines the best of creativity and enterprise, connecting young people to arts organisations and the business sector, allowing them to harness the creative approaches, networks and skill sets of both of these vibrant industries.

The programme puts young people in the lead, and supports them to realise their potential to make change happen, both for themselves and those around them. In this way, The Agency supports the development the next generation of socially-conscious entrepreneurs.

Modelled on the radical social change project, *Agência de Redes Para a Juventude* originated by Marcus Faustini in the favelas of Brazil, The Agency was adapted for the UK and first launched in Manchester and London in 2013 with the support of Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

**Joe Ferns, UK Knowledge and Portfolio Director, Big Lottery Fund, said:** *“We were really impressed by The Agency’s approach to putting power in the hands of young people to take on issues which matter to them and their communities. It’s great that National Lottery funding can bring the programme to Wales and Northern Ireland. Expanding The Agency will give even more young people opportunities to use their experience and talent as a force for good in the places they live.”*

**David Jubb, Artistic Director, Battersea Arts Centre, said:** *“The cultural sector tends to be pretty good at touring shows, but when it comes to sharing proven and creative approaches to social change, we have*

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<sup>1</sup> \*<http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/>

*a long way to go. So I am especially delighted that having learnt about The Agency from partners in Brazil, that Battersea Arts Centre and Contact is now partnering with National Theatre Wales and FabLab in Belfast to further cultivate this remarkable programme that changes young people's lives. It is simply one of the most exciting projects I've had the privilege to be part of because it puts young people in the lead, and supports them to realise their far-reaching potential to make change. Their impact is transformational, both for them and their communities".*

**Matt Fenton, Artistic Director, Contact, said:** *"We're incredibly excited about this major new development in what is a life-changing programme for young people. The journey of the project, from the favelas of Rio, to Manchester and London, and now to Wales and Northern Ireland, has been amazing. The young people involved have been consistently inspirational, and the projects they develop through the programme have genuine impact on their communities".*

**Adam Wallace, Project Manager at FabLab Belfast, said:** *"Belfast is a unique city in which to run this creative and innovative project. Historically, young people in Northern Ireland have been sidelined as positive contributors to their often sectarian communities and a programme that builds lasting skills and presents them in an entrepreneurial light is to be welcomed. In Belfast, we will recruit Agents from both sides of the community to demonstrate the positive impact on good relations this programme will have. FabLab Belfast aims to offer its creative expertise with digital maker technologies to the Agents to support them in designing enterprise-led solutions that will benefit their communities".*

**Kully Thiarai, Artistic Director, National Theatre Wales:** *"Our TEAM programme, which engages with more than 1,000 people from all walks of life in Wales and beyond, has always been the beating heart of our company. The fundamental principles and aims of The Agency are a wonderful echo of TEAM's work. It will generate real, meaningful opportunities for young people - and best of all put them in the driving seat, where they belong. We cannot wait to work with our prestigious friends and neighbours across the UK to bring this wonderful project to Wales, and to harness and nurture the entrepreneurial spirit we know young people in Wales have in spades."*

The Agency supports young people, aged 15-25, through a rigorous 28-week creative training programme to develop their own social change projects with and for the community in which they live. Their creativity and ideas drive the project, as they acquire project management and business skills, build networks and develop creative problem-solving techniques to turn their entrepreneurial ambitions into a reality. The Agents decide the focus of their enterprise; the only directive is that it must bring positive sustainable change for them and the community around them. Beyond the initial 28-week programme, the arts organisations continue to offer long-term bespoke support to each Agent and their project using their core staffing and resources.

The Agency first launched in the UK in 2013 with lead partners, Battersea Arts Centre, Contact and People's Palace Projects. Some of The Agency's alumni include: 18 year old Adem Howard, who runs *Crumbs* offering baking courses for local children, half of whom come from households that rely on food bank provisions; 17 year old Seshie Henry, who founded IAMNEXT, a leading platform for up-and-coming underground music artists in the UK; 19 year old Daisy Kateeba, who launched a clothing line for babies and toddlers, alongside skill-sharing events for young mothers to promote togetherness and prevent social isolation; 25 year old Teasha Louise, who developed an all-female sports and mentorship programme promoting inclusion and access for all; 16 year old Beth Tipping, founder of *Boundless Books*, a literature initiative for young people in care, offering free books and a virtual book club via pen-pal networks.

Over the past four years, 28 social enterprise projects have been developed by Agents in Manchester and London. Each one received £2,000 of initial financial support via the programme, and in total the Agents raised a further £71,562 to run their projects. These projects reached almost 8,000 community participants and audiences. To date, 24 of these continue to operate independently.

Over in Rio de Janeiro, The Agency's founder Marcus Faustini has led the programme since 2011, working with more than 4,000 young people (700 a year for the past six years, across 19 *favela* communities). *Agência de Redes Para a Juventude* pioneered its methodology as a response to NGO and policy initiatives which tended to approach the social and economic challenges of *favelas* by trying to impose top-down solutions that often worked against, instead of with, the energies of local people. The project's

transformative potential has been recognised by the Ford Foundation, which recently announced funding for the Rio group to focus on youth leadership development and high impact community projects for the next three years. *Agência de Redes Para a Juventude* has also been the subject of many academic research initiatives, including an impact study by Stanford University due to be released in late 2017.

**The Agency** is a Battersea Arts Centre, Contact and People's Palace Projects collaboration, in partnership with FabLab and National Theatre Wales. It is funded by the Big Lottery Fund using money raised by National Lottery players for good causes, and was originally supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

[contactmcr.com/project/theagency/](http://contactmcr.com/project/theagency/)

[bac.org.uk/content\\_category/3381/young\\_people/the\\_agency\\_1525](http://bac.org.uk/content_category/3381/young_people/the_agency_1525)

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**Notes to Editors:**

**The Big Lottery Fund** uses money raised by National Lottery players to help communities achieve their ambitions. From small, local projects to UK-wide initiatives, its funding brings people together to make a difference to their health, wellbeing and environment. Since June 2004 it has awarded £8.5 billion to projects that improve the lives of millions of people.

[Website](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#)

**The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation** is an international charitable foundation with cultural, educational, social and scientific interests. Based in Lisbon with branches in London and Paris, the Foundation is in a privileged position to support national and transnational work tackling contemporary issues. The purpose of the UK Branch, based in London, is to bring about longterm improvements in wellbeing particularly for the most vulnerable, by creating connections across boundaries (national borders, communities, disciplines and sectors) which deliver social, cultural and environmental value. The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation is behind the Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations. A report summarising the findings of the first phase of this Inquiry was released in July and is currently in a consultation phase. The Agency is one of the 40 case studies the Inquiry has profiled of inspiring and innovate practice.

[www.civicroleartsinquiry.gulbenkian.org.uk](http://www.civicroleartsinquiry.gulbenkian.org.uk)

The report in full: [bit.ly/reportcivicarts](http://bit.ly/reportcivicarts)

**People's Palace Projects** is an arts and social justice charity led by Paul Heritage and based in the Drama Department at Queen Mary, University of London. With a research focus on human rights and inequality, PPP works with internationally renowned artists and with communities from children in UK social care to homeless singers to indigenous people in Brazil. PPP is a National Portfolio organisation of Arts Council England, acknowledged as the leader in the field of UK-Brazil creative exchange and collaboration.

[www.peoplespalaceprojects.org.uk](http://www.peoplespalaceprojects.org.uk)

**Battersea Arts Centre** is a public space where people come together to be creative, see a show, explore the local heritage, play or relax. The organisation's purpose is to inspire people, to take creative risks, to shape the future.

Battersea Arts Centre encourages people to test and develop new ideas with members of the public – a process called Scratch. Scratch is used by artists to make theatre, by young people to develop entrepreneurial ideas and as a helpful process for anyone who wants to get creative.

The area of South West London and the old town hall in which Battersea Arts Centre is based, are rich in heritage. The organisation is also custodian of the Wandsworth Collection of historical artefacts, using creativity to explore the past and imagine the future.

Scratch has been adopted as far afield as Sydney and New York and shows and projects developed by people at Battersea Arts Centre travel across the UK and the world. The organisation has successfully sparked new approaches to creativity across the globe.

Each year Battersea Arts Centre:

- Welcomes over 160,000 people to its building
- Inspires the local community to get creative, including 3000 young people
- Works with over 400 artists to put on over 800 performances and tour at least 10 shows and projects

[www.bac.org.uk](http://www.bac.org.uk) | [@battersea\\_arts](https://twitter.com/battersea_arts)

**Contact** is where young people change their lives through the arts. Based in Manchester, Contact is a vibrant, professional, contemporary theatre and arts venue, with young people driving every aspect of its work. First established as a theatre in 1972, in 1999 Contact reinvented itself as a multi-disciplinary creative space specialising in producing work with, and providing opportunities for, young people aged 13 to 30.

Today, Contact is recognised nationally and internationally as a game-changer in the field of youth leadership and creativity. Contact works with the young people of Greater Manchester and with local, national and international artists to create new models of arts engagement – fostering new talent, building skills and ambition – and creating important new productions that tour nationally.

Contact is unique in its ethos of placing young people's decision-making at the heart of everything. Young people work alongside staff in deciding the artistic programme, making staff appointments and act as full Board members. This model is seen as a national exemplar of best practice in relation to young people and diversity, influencing organisations nationwide.

[www.contactmcr.com](http://www.contactmcr.com)

**FabLab Belfast** at the Ashton Community Trust is a fully kitted digital fabrication workshop which gives everyone, from children through to entrepreneurs and businesses, the capability to turn their ideas and concepts into a reality. Inside you'll find tools and 3D design software, state of the art computer controlled machinery that includes a 3D printer, a laser cutter, CNC router, full electronics station and a large scale vinyl cutter.

Established in 2012 as one of the first FabLabs in Ireland working with over 2500 people per year many of whom are from areas of high social deprivation, in addition FabLab Belfast is a driving force in establishing a nationwide network of FabLabs across the UK and Ireland.

FabLab's were born from an outreach project by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in inner-city Boston in 2005. Since then FabLab's have quickly spread around the world, there are over 1000 FabLab's from the inner cities of the USA to villages of Africa.

Ashton Community Trust (ACT) is a social enterprise and development trust which seeks to make North Belfast a better place for its residents to live and prosper. It does this through the provision of services, employment, training and community development. ACT has grown over the last twenty years to the extent where it now employs over 160 people and has an annual turnover in excess of £3m.

[www.fablabbelfast.org](http://www.fablabbelfast.org)

**National Theatre Wales** has been making English-language productions in locations all over Wales, the UK, internationally and online since March 2010. It operates from a small base in Cardiff's city centre, but works all over the country and beyond, using Wales' rich and diverse landscape, its towns, cities and villages, its incredible stories and rich talent as its inspiration. National Theatre Wales is supported by the Welsh Government and the Arts Council of Wales.

[nationaltheatrewales.org](http://nationaltheatrewales.org)