














About: Membership Recruitment

Membership recruitment is a number of specified actions through which the youth theatre can proactively seek new members. Membership recruitment should be a consistent proactive integral part of a youth theatre's annual programme and should not be driven by dissipating numbers.





Why...Actively Recruit?

Actively recruiting allows the youth theatre to:

-  Look at its membership and ask if it is representative of its catchment area;
-  Manage the group demographic, meaning that the group is representative in terms of gender, geography, backgrounds, ethnicity etc.;
-  Maintain healthy membership numbers;
-  Engage with their local community;
-  Engage with a new or wider audience;
-  Encourage present members to be open to change and challenges
-  Promote the social development of all members;
-  Discourage present members from forming cliques;
-  Encourage leaders and present members to avoid complacency;
-  Welcome new ideas and input, both artistically and organisationally;
-  Avoid sudden dissipation of membership numbers.

Before Recruiting

Youth theatres should:

-  Have a clear description of themselves;
-  Articulate what the youth theatre can offer to the young person;
-  Have a recruitment policy and a clear strategy for recruiting;
-  Have a clear plan or system for introducing new members into the group or youth theatre.

Who...is responsible for recruitment?






Firstly, choose someone who will be responsible for the coordination and marketing of the recruitment drive. This may be included in the facilitator's or leader's job or it may be the responsibility of a staff member of the youth theatre or the parent organisation.

Secondly, choose who will carry out the recruitment drive. This could be more than one person taking more than one approach. It is also not unusual to include present members as well as leaders.

The important thing is that the people chosen to recruit should understand the youth theatre, be able to speak about it in persuasive and positive ways and they should also understand the target group i.e. the young people. A good place to start is to imagine the young person asking, "What's in it for me?".

Starting off

The people involved in the recruitment drive should decide:




-  Who is the target group?
-  How many new members does the youth theatre want to recruit?
-  What can be said and done to persuade young people to join?
-  When is the recruitment drive going to happen?
-  How is the recruitment drive going to happen?



Who...is the target group?

The more diverse the group of young people in a youth theatre, the more representative it is of a community. This sends a message that the youth theatre welcomes all young people regardless of gender, background, locality or previous artistic experience and this ultimately may help in future recruitment drives. This could also provide more community support for the youth theatre. Who the youth theatre targets may change from year to year depending on the current social and cultural mix of the group. It may be that a particular gender or locality needs to be targeted in any given year. The important thing is to ensure recruitment promotes diversity.

When...do youth theatres recruit?

Youth theatres should recruit annually. The time of year can vary, but most youth theatres choose a time that coincides with the beginning of the school year. Therefore late summer/early autumn can be a good time to concentrate on a dedicated recruitment drive. However during the year there may be other opportunities to raise the profile of the youth theatre amongst its target group:








-  Invite and advertise your productions and events to school groups and other youth groups and clubs;
-  Attend events in your local community where you can get to talk to youth workers, teachers and parents;
-  Encourage your present members to talk about their youth theatre;

-  Have a generic leaflet or poster that would attract young people and includes the youth theatres contact details that you can leave in places where young people may hang out e.g. local library, café, cinema etc;
-  Take definite details from any enquiries that you receive during the year or at events or productions so that contact can be made nearer the time for recruitment.





Preparing...to recruit?

Enquiries




The youth theatre may get random enquiries throughout the year. The following information should be on hand should anyone enquire about joining the youth theatre:

-  What age group does the youth theatre cater for?
-  How do people join?
-  When can people join?
-  Is there a fee, if so how much?
-  Where and when do workshops happen?
-  What exciting opportunities does the youth theatre offer to members? Productions, festivals, travel, fun etc. Answer the “What’s in it for me?” question.
-  Finish the enquiry by explaining details of what’s going to happen next? E.g, “I’m going to send out information”, “Is it okay to ring you when next event/audition/recruitment is happening?”, “Can I email you about youth theatres up and coming events?”






Also.....

-  Ask the enquirer how they heard about the youth theatre. This could help you build up a profile of where or how is best to tell young people about the youth theatre in the future;
-  Remember to take relevant contact details;
-  Let the person know when and how you are going to contact them;
-  Leave the conversation on an open note by saying that if they have any further questions not to hesitate to give you a call.




Word of mouth

-  Though a very passive form of recruitment it can be effective.
-  Both members and adults involved can act as promoters of the youth theatre.
-  Relying solely on word of mouth can lessen the chances of creating a diverse group.



Advertising



-  Advertisements for recruitment can appear in local newspapers, free listings, village or school newsletters, church bulletins, and be placed on bebo and youth theatre websites.
-  Articles throughout the year may also help. Articles could be about forthcoming or current productions, events or projects. They may also be about an individual or individuals that have had the opportunity to take part in an exciting project through their involvement in the youth theatre e.g. the National Youth Theatre, international exchange, acceptance into third level theatre studies or a professional production or company or indeed starting their own company.
-  Always check if it is possible to include the youth theatres contact details alongside articles.
-  Place flyers and posters in local schools, parish and community centres, libraries, arts centres, church notice boards, the local GP waiting room, health centres etc.
-  Make sure any literature you produce is in a form that 'speaks' to young people. The language used for funders, parent organisations or other agencies will probably not suffice in communicating your message to potential members. Research your target group, look at successful teen websites and current teen advertisements. Remember to try and answer the question, "What's in it for me?", and follow it with, "This is how you get that".

One-to-one contact




-  In youth theatres where the leader is local and known to the young people and parents of the community it may be beneficial to talk to people on the street .
-  Be proactive, especially when coming up to a recruitment drive, by letting people know that the youth theatre will be recruiting soon in any conversation where appropriate.
-  Let youth workers, leaders of other youth groups and arts workers know that the youth theatre is looking for new members. Youth theatres can receive referrals from youth services and local teachers who believe that youth theatre could be of benefit to a particular young person they are working with or who have expressed an interest in theatre or the arts.

Members




-  Encourage present members to talk about their involvement in the youth theatre to others.
-  In a more formal way, present members could make planned presentations about the youth theatre to local youth groups and schools.

-  Ask past members who have gone on to work in the theatre or arts to include their youth theatre experience in programme biographies or media articles.
-  Include positive testimonials or quotes from past and present members in production programmes, flyers, on websites etc.




Organisations

-  Use the profile of a parent organisation or workshop venue to promote the youth theatre
-  Link in with other organisations who may be doing arts projects with local young people. They may be able to promote a recruitment drive or refer a young person.
-  The youth theatre may be able to attract members where its parent organisation or venue runs other youth or arts programmes.

Productions, events and projects

-  Advertise your productions and events to school groups and other youth groups and clubs and invite them to attend.
-  Keep a sign-up sheet at productions for, “Are you interested in hearing more about (*youth theatre*)?”
-  There may be opportunities to perform in local festivals, street events or conferences, where the youth theatre can promote itself to a wider audience.

Youth Theatre Programme

-  If resources allow, the youth theatre could run youth drama projects throughout the year. These are projects that run for a specific amount of time with a specific group of young people. The young people could then be invited to take part in the youth theatre.
-  The youth theatre could partner with a summer project, youth service or local authority to reach young people during the summer months. They could run taster workshops as part of a larger programme or offer a complete programme. Then young people who are interested in doing more could be contacted during a recruitment drive.
-  If there has been a number of enquiries during the year, it may be worthwhile holding an open event so the youth theatre can contact everybody that has been in touch during the year: young people, parents, local groups etc and invites them to an ‘Open Day’. It could consist of a short showing of some of the work the youth theatre has done recently either ‘live’ or on screen, displays of photographs, programmes, posters, a social element e.g. tea, coffee, biscuits, chats with present members. Prime established members to ‘sell’ being involved in a youth theatre. They could also do presentations or Q&A sessions. Create a welcoming atmosphere. This open event should preferably take place in the

venue where the youth theatre holds its main programme. Someone specific should be responsible for gathering contact details of people who are interested in hearing more about the youth theatre or are interested in joining or attending other youth theatre productions or events.



Taster workshops can work. However they must be thought through. Think of the qualities that make a successful introductory workshop: safe yet a little challenging, fun, voluntary participation. For taster workshops it is best to try and create a situation where all these qualities are present. For example, going to a school and doing taster workshops with a class that have been told they must take part, creates an artificial experience and may give the wrong impression of youth theatre therefore turning off potential members. However if the school agrees to let people who are interested attend, this can go some way towards recreating the workshop experience. Young people can then make a decision based on a more real experience.

The Recruitment Process

If the youth theatre wishes to manage its intake, it is important that there is some way that the youth theatre is knowledgeable about who is joining the youth theatre. Youth theatres could accept anybody that comes in their door at any given time during the year. Though, when struggling for numbers, this may seem like an attractive option, it can have adverse effects on building group dynamics which in turn can affect the experience for the young person .

The actual recruitment process should be quite tight in terms of time. For example the amount of time between an open day, audition and starting in a youth theatre can have an effect on how many new members actually turn up to the first workshop. This may be a case of trial and error but it is advisable not to leave too long a gap between the official recruitment process and the start date.

It would be advisable for the youth theatre to decide on a selection process, regardless of whether they accept all young people who have shown an interest or if they are over-subscribed. This can also put value on the work of the youth theatre. There should be some process where the young person can show they are committed to joining the youth theatre.

One or a selection of the following may help in deciding what the youth theatre's recruitment process looks like:



Application Form

At the very least the young people should be asked to state their interest in joining the youth theatre in writing. Also it allows the youth theatre to collect information in a more formal manner

that may be more acceptable when doing taster workshops in schools etc. An application form can also allow the youth theatre to collect information prior to the young person joining that may be useful in terms of welfare, programming and artistic experience of the group. It also means that the youth theatre has the young person's contact details to hand. A phone call can make all the difference between a young person showing up or not.

Information Session

An information session can be arranged for all those who have applied to join the youth theatre. This can allow the young person to attend the youth theatre's venue prior to taking part in workshops. This may make them more comfortable in attending their first workshop. The youth theatre can give information on themselves, answer any questions and also be aware of the level of demand. They can also include a short chat on what a young person can expect as a member of the youth theatre and also what is expected of them. If the youth theatre is dealing with a younger age group, it may also want to invite parents along.

Auditions

Some youth theatres hold auditions. This is where phone contact can be invaluable as the youth theatre can explain the audition process and handle any apprehensions the young person may have about attending an audition. Youth theatre auditions are traditionally group auditions. They can include a short active section that includes elements of the workshop process, usually the fun stuff. They can also include a short chat on what a young person can expect as a member of the youth theatre and also what is expected of them. It may even be useful to ask each young person their reasons for wanting to join. The young person can also be given the opportunity to ask questions. If appropriate, especially if the youth theatre is over subscribed, the youth theatre may also explain its selection process (see below).

Selection

It is important, that where a youth theatre is oversubscribed, selection criteria are decided upon and that the youth theatre can answer any questions in this regard. Selection criteria should be fair, transparent and in keeping with the youth theatre's inclusion policy.

Follow up

Whatever recruitment process the youth theatre employs, it should follow up with all those who helped in the recruitment drive and with all those who took part in the recruitment process. A thank you to all who helped builds good public relations and also strengthens links for the future. In the case of youth theatres being over-subscribed, those who have not been successful should be encouraged, if they will still be in the age range, to audition the following year. Those that have

been successful should be informed that they have a place and given instructions about the next step. This may be the completion of a confirmation slip, that needs to be returned before a certain date, or the return of a membership form or contract.

Introducing New Members

It is important to have a system for introducing new members into the group. Regardless of the method the youth theatre uses, it is important to acknowledge that there are new people in the youth theatre. It may be beneficial to do some introductory work with the new members. Depending on numbers and resources this could be a one off introductory session or a whole term to develop group dynamics and drama literacy within the new group before they join the larger group.

If the new members are joining an established group, it would be beneficial that the work done in the workshops acknowledges that there are participants with varying levels of experience involved. This could affect theme, content or structure. The most important thing is that the new members are given a good experience so they can become loyal, active members of the youth theatre.