

## **TENDERFOOT: An apprentice theatre programme for young adults**

**TENDERFOOT apprentice** – noun. *On leaving school Herbert joined his father as an engineering apprentice* **trainee**, learner, probationer, tyro, novice, neophyte, raw recruit, fledgling, new boy/girl, novitiate, pupil, student; beginner, starter, greenhorn, **TENDERFOOT**. **OPPOSITE** veteran.

Tenderfoot is The Civic Theatre, Tallaght's apprentice theatre programme for second level students. Each year, Tenderfoot offers fifty Transition Year students from schools in South Dublin County the opportunity to learn about theatre by making theatre. Established in 2007, in collaboration with South Dublin County Council Arts Office and Veronica Coburn as theatre artists-in-residence, the programme is now in its thirteenth year.

Tenderfoot is an apprentice theatre programme, based on a 'young person as artist' approach, with a focus on access, inclusivity and contemporary practice.

Tenderfoot is an access programme. It provides access, for Transition Year students in South Dublin County, to the art of theatre. For those who are lucky enough to earn one of the fifty annual places on the programme, they will have between eighteen to twenty-four precious days during their fourth year of secondary education to learn about theatre by making theatre. The model is one of apprenticeship: learn by doing, learn by working alongside experts in their field.

The programme runs for six months from September to February and fifty students from eight schools, representing the geographic and socio-economic make-up of the region, participate. Students are not required to have any experience, only interest. Selection is through low focus group workshop held in the schools to promote the widest possible access. This, along with the fact that there is no cost to students to take part in Tenderfoot, provides young people who wouldn't ordinarily gravitate towards the arts an opportunity to initiate an interest.

In the course of the programme, students work alongside experts in their field, theatre artists - writers, directors, designers and production managers - to develop their art or skill, be that writing, production design, costume design, sound design, music composition, visual design, performance or production management. Tenderfoot's core mentors are Veronica Coburn, Davey Kelleher and Gavin Kostick. Other mentors over the years have included Amy Conroy, Liam Halligan, Mark Galione, Marcus Costello, Caoimhe Regan, Deirdre Dwyer, Roger Gregg, Kilian Waters, José Miguel Jiminez, Jack Cawley and John Gunning.

In the first phase of the programme, a number of the students, approximately eighteen, participate in a targeted programme designed to introduce them to the basic conventions of drama, the work of existing playwrights and the discipline of writing for the stage. The ultimate aim of this programme is for each of these students to write an original play for the stage. This initial phase occurs between October and December.

The final phase, a fulltime three-week-long work experience module during the following January, sees all the participating young people act as a youth ensemble, as

they design, stage manage and perform a number of the plays that they have written under the guidance of professional mentors. The plays are performed in The Main Space in The Civic, a political decision that values the distinct voice of young theatre makers.

### **Tenderfoot Core Values**

- **Access.** By working alongside the education system, Tenderfoot provides the widest possible access. In so doing it bridges the gap between education and the arts.
- **Occupation.** By working inside arts buildings, young people receive the message that such spaces are for them.
- **Apprenticeship.** Learn by doing. Learn alongside experts in their field.
- **Contemporaneity.** It is vitally important that there is a connection between what young people do in a supported environment such as Tenderfoot and contemporary practice.
- **Excellence.** Everyone in Tenderfoot, young person and mentor alike, works to a level of excellence where excellence is defined as 'working to the best of your ability'.
- **Articulation.** It is important that the work produced is, at some level, an articulation of the young people who make it: their existence, their lives, their views.
- **Artistic integrity.** Our young artists are not restricted in their work.
- **Young person as artist.** Young people have the capacity and the need to behave as artists. They have the capacity and the need to, through their art, reflect on their existence and the world they live in.
- **Peer engagement.** It is vitally important to provide young adult audiences with opportunities to engage with art made by their peers.

Thus far, in excess of 550 students from eleven different schools have had the opportunity to be part of a Tenderfoot theatre ensemble. Many of those students had never been to the theatre or taken part in any drama activity before Tenderfoot. Graduates, or 'Tenderfeet', have gone on to join other ensembles, for example, youth theatres and film collectives. Past Tenderfeet are also encouraged to maintain a relationship with The Civic Theatre by attending plays and events at much reduced prices, through their voluntary usher programme, or through participation in The Civic's resident youth theatre, Giant Wolf.

This is Tenderfoot's thirteenth year and the first of a three-year process of research and development. The next three years will see the implementation of *IMPACT – Tenderfoot Moving Forward*. This is a strategic development plan to **re-imagine the model to engage with all schools in South Dublin County** and to **provide the foundation for the building of a visionary model of comprehensive theatre provision for young adults<sup>1</sup>**, spanning participatory and professional practice.

*"When I look back on my adolescence, there are a few experiences that I consider to have truly shaped me as an individual; there is no doubt that Tenderfoot is among these."*

*"Tenderfoot has to be the best experience not only for TY but for my entire secondary school years."*

*"The best school experience of my life. Made me so happy all of the time. I learnt so much about myself."*

*"I've never been happier than in Tenderfoot and I'm dreading going back to school because I'm constantly sad there."*

*"It has made me a more positive, happy and confident person."*

*"It gave me such a clear view of what I want to do. I learnt so much about myself."*

*"I now feel like pursuing a career in theatre as well as drama at third-level."*

*"It has opened my eyes to new experience."*

In this section, we provide an overview of some of the key aspects which make up Tenderfoot's practical approach as well as its philosophical foundations. We outline 'IMPACT', our five-year strategic plan for moving forward.

Tenderfoot is, first and foremost, about learning and **learning to articulate**: what you have to say, what you want to say, what you think is important to say. It is also about learning to listen - to other opinions, perspectives and viewpoints. It is about learning all of that through the medium of theatre and, in so doing, learning that theatre, and the arts in general, and the spaces attached to them, theatres, galleries, concert halls, are for you. Our Tenderfeet learn that they are creative beings capable of taking their place in a creative society.

The function of Tenderfoot was never and is not to produce the artists of tomorrow. That may happen and it is a wonderful thing if it does. The function of Tenderfoot will always be to afford our young people a space where they can function as artists, because the need to explore and to understand and to provoke, in the safety of an artistic space where the tools are concept, aesthetic form, and the stuff of what it is to be

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<sup>1</sup> 'Young adulthood' is defined here as 13-18, the age parameters of a second level student.

human - feeling, psychology, intellect and the physical body - does not lie dormant until the age of eighteen. And our young people need to engage with art (theatre in the case of Tenderfoot) that speaks directly to them, that is made for them. Tenderfoot is not about the professionalization of our young people. It is about the integration of our young people in the professional arts sector. It is about recognising the fact that the arts, as a leader in the field of creativity, is a vital part of our society, and if that society is to flourish, then our young people need to be integral in our arts infrastructure. Participatory programmes such as Tenderfoot, which see professional artists working with young people, break down barriers and make possible the reality of a creative society.



*Tenderfoot in action, The Civic Theatre*

### **YOUNG PERSON AS ARTIST**

Why do people make art? Why have people always made art? Why did our prehistoric ancestors scratch rough images into solid rock? They did so to notate their reality, to record their reality and to interpret their reality, to decipher what was worthy of record and to imagine another reality. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'art' as:

The expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power.

At Tenderfoot, we describe art in simple terms as a 'form of expression of thought or feeling'. Surely, the need to do that is strong for young adults, whose lives are in a constant state of change and uncertainty. Tenderfoot is based on an approach that considers that young adults are capable of functioning as artists.

By 'functioning as artists' we mean here 'to function in the same way as a professional artist', in terms of seriousness of application and reception. This thought also encompasses artistic freedom. Our young people are not constrained in what they can write. We are aware that our young people, due to their age, cannot identify as professional artists, but they *can* function as such. The idea of an artist at Tenderfoot is based around the integrity of the creative endeavor, rather than the obtaining of an exam or a grade. Learning is through doing, through apprenticeship with professionals in their field.

**Young people have seldom been considered as capable of functioning as artists.** Until relatively recently, the connection between children/young people and theatre was based around the idea of the child/young person as audience, or receiver. Young people have been more generally categorised as receivers, rather than makers, of art. They are taught about art. They are facilitated in their engagement with art.

The place of the child in theatre history is also vague. Theatre for or with young people has been historically connected more with either social work or education than with art. Bedard and Tolch (1989) argue this is because:

Children's theater [sic] has been, historically, more the product of the educator and the social worker than the producer or the theater artist. Theater with and for young people has thus not been included in traditional theater history studies.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, Helen Jaksch (2016) points out that:

The history of theater places the child in the audience, not on the stage, not at the typewriter, and not at the helm of a production. The history follows those who act and for too long children have been told that theater is "what you sit and watch others do" (Slade 1954:270).<sup>3</sup>

But what of a child or a young person's need to create art? Surely, the need to create is fundamental to the human condition and, if so, then why would it lie dormant until the age of consent? Younger children use their imagination to express ideas and feelings every day; their art form is play. With the arrival of the teenage years, with the growing presence of the trappings of the adult world and increased pressure and responsibility, the balance of a young person's life shifts. This, then, is a crucial time and, in the interests of metaphysical health, it is of vital importance that opportunities are provided for young people to exercise/exorcise their ideas and feelings imaginatively.

Despite the existence of companies, individuals and theatres internationally who have, for a long time, worked with young people through an approach which considers them as artists in their own right (for example, among recent work, Otroerend Goed's 'Once and for All' (2008) and Hetpaleis' 'The Hamilton Complex, Nothing Is What It Seems When You're Thirteen'), a recent paradigm shift in the way children and young people are considered has fortified the position of this approach. Historian Steven Mintz points

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<sup>2</sup> Bedard and Tolch, 1989. *Spotlight on the Child*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Jaksch, H. 2016. *I want everyone to witness my youth: youth-created theatre in America, 1980-present*. Unpublished dissertation prospectus

to a **shift towards the agency and voice of young people** more generally, which Jaksch argues is mirrored in the theatre:

While many studies still focus on the ways that childhood is defined and represented and on how children are treated, scholarship has increasingly shifted attention to the children themselves: their voices, experience, and agency.<sup>4</sup>

This, Jaksch (2016) argues, opens the possibilities of reconsidering young people, not merely as trainees for adulthood, but holding creative and social rights on their own terms.

It may be argued that these shifts, towards the agency, voice and creativity of young people, have been mirrored in changes in the focus of education, and consequently curricula, in Ireland over the past two decades. Methods of learning have, in many areas of both primary and secondary education, certainly theoretically, moved from passive to active, with the child/young person increasingly seen as an active agent in their own learning.

The most recent Primary School Curriculum, published by the Government of Ireland in 1999, presented a strong vision of child-centred education, with children viewed as active agents in their own learning<sup>5</sup>. The introduction of Transition Year in 1994 and the new Junior Cycle in 2014, both part of secondary education, reflect the desire for a broader definition of learning, with a focus on creativity, innovation and critical thinking. These changes are paving the way for a new Senior Cycle, with a similar shift away from rote learning towards active, independent and critical thinking. A recent research paper (Burns 2018)<sup>6</sup> highlights the difficulties for students in transitioning from second to third level education, highlighting a 'mismatch' between second level and post-school education as students shift from rote learning to independent thinking. The paper challenges the effectiveness of the Leaving Certificate assessment to foster creativity and intellectual stimulation among students, qualities which are required in third level education and in the development of a creative population more generally.

Seeing the young person as capable of functioning as an artist in their own right, active in the expression of their own thoughts and ideas, is a fundamental aspect of

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<sup>4</sup> Mintz, "Why the History of Childhood Matters," 22.

<sup>5</sup> A report by the ESRI, based on the 'Growing Up in Ireland' Study, questions the extent to which this vision is matched by reality, with variations in approaches among teachers, schools and gender of children:

'It is of policy concern ... that some groups of children have greater access than other groups to the kinds of active methods which may engage them in learning. Thus, girls, those attending fee-paying schools, those attending gaelscoileanna and those in non-disadvantaged schools are more likely to experience active learning in their classroom than boys, those in English-medium schools and those in disadvantaged (DEIS) schools'. (ESRI 2012)

<sup>6</sup> *'Is it all memory recall: An empirical investigation of intellectual skills requirements in Leaving Certificate examination papers in Ireland'*, by Denise Burns, (Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection, School of Policy and Practice, Institute of Education, Dublin City University) Ann Devitt, (School of Education, Trinity College Dublin) Gerry McNamara, Joe O'Hara and Martin Brown (Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection, School of Policy & Practice, Institute of Education, Dublin City University) (2016).

Tenderfoot, affecting both the methods of working and the work produced. This approach aligns Tenderfoot with recent shifts in education in Ireland.

Three key, and interrelated, ways in which this 'young person as artist' approach manifests through Tenderfoot are:

- An **apprenticeship** model: learning directly from experts in their field;
- A focus on contemporary work and the importance given to the **writing of plays** by young people themselves, and thus putting to the forefront their voices, experiences and agency;
- **Freedom of expression** in a supported and supportive environment.

*"I'm able to express myself better."*

*"It has taught me to express myself in everything I do."*

### **APPRENTICESHIP, PLAYWRITING AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

Connected to the philosophical underpinning of Tenderfoot, which considers the young person as artist, is an approach based on apprenticeship. The aim at Tenderfoot is to provide students with the opportunity to learn about theatre in a hands-on way. The working ethos is one of apprenticeship: learn by doing; learn by working alongside experts in their field.

In the course of the programme, students work alongside theatre artists who are experts in their field - writers, directors, designers and production managers - to develop their art or skill, be that writing, production design, costume design, performance or production management.

#### ***Importance of young voice: playwriting and freedom of expression***

*"I feel proud of the Tenderfoot performances because young people wrote and produced them themselves."*

Another fundamental part of Tenderfoot's approach is the production of new written material by the young people themselves. **This is an important part of Tenderfoot's commitment to contemporary work.**

Just as the overall approach to Tenderfoot is one of apprenticeship, the model of writing is also based on this. The young person is considered as an artist and learns from and alongside a professional playwright, an expert in their field. Tenderfoot's young writers are treated in the same way as any artist would be treated: what they have to say is taken seriously. This manifests in an absence of limits on what they can write about, an

absence of limits on form, including language, and an absence of thematic parameters. This puts the focus firmly on the young artistic voice and creates a unique experience for the young adult writers who may be used to thematic, titular and formal parameters within their school-based education. At the same time, **guidance** is an integral part of apprenticeship. By guidance, here we refer to a focus on opinion rather than fact, in opposition to a methodology based on an axis of right/wrong; and on existing practice, in the form of the work of contemporary playwrights, as information and inspiration. The use of contemporary texts and work facilitates engaged, opinion-based discussion, ensures a connection to the real world, and supports a vision of theatre as an art form as being useful and meaningful. Tenderfoot playwright mentors work in recognition of the age and maturity of the young person.

The following text is an excerpt from the performances at the end of the 2019/2020 Tenderfoot programme:

**The central purpose of Tenderfoot is to facilitate the articulation of a young artistic voice. This year (2020), we asked our writers what they wanted to achieve with their work.**

“We want our audience to be moved, but not in the way you are moved by cute puppies on the internet. We want our audience to think back and realise that the stories that we told were theirs. We want our audience to relate to the work, to see themselves in the characters we present, and to gain comfort in the fact that other people experience these things to.

We want our audience to have a good time. We want them to enjoy our work, but we also want to provoke thought. In presenting stories from real life, in exploring the stuff and substance of our lives, we are saying that these are things that are worth talking about. These are things that we need to talk about, and this is a place where we can talk about important things. We are letting our audience know that it is okay to talk.

We like to think of our work as an offering, of an idea, or a concept or a scenario. One that is useful or stimulating or challenging or provocative.

We want our audience to realise that we have something to say. And in speaking out, our peers will realise that they are not alone. And adults will understand that we are more mature than they think we are. Parents, adults, don't really know their kids. Teenage culture isn't good, we know that, but we can't change it. We can only navigate it, and, hopefully, survive it.”

Tenderfoot has a firm structure. There are clear and articulated guidelines for behaviour. The purpose of the structure is to provide a space within which the young people can have freedom to think and feel imaginatively. There is no restriction in Tenderfoot on what can be thought or felt. There are no suitable topics or limits on language. Within their art form, the young people have full range. With freedom, of course, comes responsibility, and the young Tenderfeet are also held dramaturgically responsible for their feelings and ideas as they realise them in words, action, cloth, and spatial and aural form.



Tenderfoot is unique in providing a space and the required support for young people to write for the theatre. Youth Theatre Ireland (YTI) recognizes the value of the work produced in Tenderfoot and has embraced the young people's work in a number of their programmes. A selection of Tenderfoot plays has been accepted onto YTI's 'Playshare' database, a store of theatre works suitable for production by youth theatres and youth groups. In addition to this, four Tenderfoot plays from across the years were chosen by YTI for their 'New Stage' programme in 2011. This national programme promotes excellent new writing for youth theatres/groups by highlighting a number of exceptional new works in a given year. In 2015, a volume of plays, *'Tenderfoot: A Volume of Plays By and For Young People'*, featuring thirteen plays and three monologues, written by a number of Tenderfoot's 15/16 year-old playwrights, was published by The Civic Theatre in association with South Dublin County library. The work in the volume is central to a new drama module, 'Page to Stage', offered by Tenderfoot and The Civic Theatre to secondary school teachers as part of the new Junior Cycle Training (JCT) programme.

### ***Choosing playwright-mentors***

The Tenderfoot writing programme is run by the core mentors: Veronica Coburn, Tenderfoot's Programme Director; Gavin Kostick, Literary Manager with Fishamble Theatre Company and one other playwright/theatre-maker. This third post has been occupied by Liam Halligan, of the now defunct Storytellers Theatre Company, and Amy Conroy of HotForTheatre. It is currently held by Davey Kelleher, independent theatre producer, director and theatre-maker. Core mentors also direct the Tenderfoot performance programme. Looking forward, the choice of new playwriting mentors focuses on a number of factors. Tenderfoot playwriting mentors need to be:

- Professional practicing playwrights in support of Tenderfoot's apprenticeship model;
- Capable of mentoring, where mentoring is defined as using one's own practice and a knowledge of wider contemporary practice to advise and guide young writers, with a view to enabling and empowering their original artistic voice;
- Capable of observing The Civic Theatre's health and safety guidelines for working with young people.

In terms of putting together a team of mentors the following factors apply:

- Inclusion of a wide representation of style and form;
- Inclusion of a range of age, with an emphasis on the need for young playwrights, whose world may be closer to that of the young participants;
- Chemistry: the interesting choice, the visionary choice, the 'what will happen if we bring this playwright in contact with young writers?'

### ***Choosing apprentice playwrights***

There are a number of factors which influence the choice of Tenderfoot's young adult playwrights. These are the same factors that influence the choice of all Tenderfoot participants. Places are offered to students because they satisfy some or all of the factors below.

- **Access:** In offering Tenderfoot places through South Dublin County's schools, and in being free of charge, Tenderfoot provides a first opportunity to young adults to be interested and become involved.
- **Inclusivity:** Tenderfoot works to represent as best it can the socio-economic and cultural make-up of South Dublin County's young adult population.
- **Interest:** Interest can be inaugural or developed and is measured through a willingness to smile and engage and try things in a low-focus audition workshop which prioritizes fun games and activities.
- **Ability:** To perform or to write, ascertained through a simple writing exercise completed by those interested in the writing programme after the audition workshop, or to participate, evident in the workshop or through information provided on an application form. Application form information is most useful for technical disciplines such as film for theatre, where students might have certain relevant experience or knowledge.
- **Necessity:** Sometimes a place is offered for broader educational reasons, such as the personal development of or the particular benefit to a young person.

### ***Producing and performing the work***

*"I never thought I would act in front of people, but I feel like Tenderfoot has opened a new door in my life."*

*"I felt like I became more confident in performing in front of people."*

*"It boosted my confidence & self-esteem."*

The final Tenderfoot performances, made up of four to six of the students' plays and monologues, play to two distinct audiences: The Civic Theatre's general audience, for whom engagement with this seldom heard theatrical voice can be both challenging and stimulating; and a peer audience for whom the experience of engaging with art made by young artists can be profound. One of the most exciting elements of Tenderfoot is the peer reaction to the work.

### **INCLUSION, ACCESS AND ARTISTRY**

*"Acting has always been something I've loved but have been unable to participate in due to lack of opportunities in my current school and area."*

Quality, in both form and content, comes from prioritizing access and inclusion. What does this mean?

A focus on access and inclusion may seem to be in tension with quality and artistry. By choosing young people who have a genuine interest rather than solely those with an obvious talent, the focus moves away from privilege and towards inclusion. In prioritizing access and inclusiveness, Tenderfoot works to a level of excellence, where excellence is defined as everyone, mentor and young person alike, working to the best

of their ability. In working to this definition of excellence, Tenderfoot is able to afford young people a first-chance opportunity. In this way, Tenderfoot is distinctly different from other opportunities available to young adults, where the 'best' or those who are known to be 'interested in that sort of thing' are the focus. In Tenderfoot, the focus is clearly on the emerging artistic voice, the young writer.

Engagement with audience, particularly a peer audience, tends to be strong and meaningful, with as much integrity as any theatre interaction. Curation of the work is an important aspect of maintaining and pushing quality. Despite the fact that the young people are considered as artists, it is also recognised that they are young, and that they may not be fully formed as artists due to their age. The programme aims to open up possibilities so that they may develop as artists. It is the responsibility of Tenderfoot mentors to guide the young people, and to produce work that is ready.

Working directly with schools has been an important aspect of maintaining access and inclusivity. However, it is also important to note that Tenderfoot operates in tandem with, but simultaneously outside of, the education system. By operating *alongside* the system, access is ensured. Student participation in Tenderfoot does not carry a financial cost in order to ensure the widest possible access. By operating *outside* of that system, the artistic integrity of the work is ensured. Tenderfeet are uncensored in the creation of their work.

Through the expansion of Tenderfoot over the next three years through IMPACT, we aim to expand access to the programme and simultaneously use the expanded structure to push quality to an even higher level.

### **Beyond Tenderfoot: What next for 'Tenderfeet'?**

The Civic Theatre is committed to developing a youth arts pathway for young people who have come through Tenderfoot. We recognise that Tenderfoot, for many, is a first encounter with theatre, and indeed the arts, and we want to support our young people; we want to enable our young people to take further steps.

21% of 2018/2019 'Tenderfeet' had never been to the theatre before taking part in the Tenderfoot programme. 92% said that they would be more inclined to go to the theatre having taken part in Tenderfoot.

In pursuit of that, The Civic have two initiatives for Tenderfeet. Resonating with the Tenderfoot programme that develops expressive and organisational abilities, there are two in-house follow-on opportunities. Our Tenderfeet can become involved in The Civic's voluntary usher programme and they can also apply to become a member of our in-house youth theatre, Giant Wolf @ The Civic, under the artistic leadership of Lloyd Collins and Calanthe Forde.

### **OTHER INITIATIVES RUN BY TENDERFOOT**

- **INSPIRE Programme**

Since 2017, the Civic Theatre has been working in partnership with Tallaght Community School to introduce the world of theatre to the students. The focus of the partnership is a series of sponsored trips to The Civic Theatre to see age-appropriate work. Aply called INSPIRE, and funded through The Civic Theatre's philanthropic fund, the programme is investigating the effect of systemic and systematic exposure to theatre on a school population. Starting in 2017, each year, an incoming first year class is selected to participate. That class is brought to see three or four contemporary pieces of theatre in The Civic over the course of the school year. The programme has the full support of Tallaght Community School staff, in particular the relevant class teachers, and could not operate without their cooperation. The pilot, now in its third year, currently has three classes attending theatre in The Civic: the original class who are now in third year, the second class who are now in second year and the most recent class who are midway through their first year of secondary school. At the height of the pilot, there will be one class from each year involved in the programme. Feedback, thus far, has been extremely positive, with teachers noticing a 'higher than average willingness to participate in lessons, specifically reading parts in plays, discussing scenes and characters and displaying a higher than average level of interest and engagement'.

- **'Page to Stage'**

'Page to Stage' is a workshop developed by Veronica Coburn and offered by Tenderfoot and The Civic Theatre to second level teachers as part of the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) Support Programme. 'Page to Stage' promotes the concept of 'young person as artist' and makes a connection between drama in a school context and contemporary theatre practice, in the form of a workshop for second level teachers exploring the use of drama in a school context. Using contemporary dramatic texts as a springboard, the workshop explores the key elements of drama, exercises to develop dramatic skills in the classroom and the benefits of working creatively. The programme aims to support secondary school teachers as they start to work with drama in a school setting, by inviting them to think about drama in an educational setting as about participation and understanding through creative expression, rather than about a right or wrong opinion on the interpretation of a play. The workshop aims to give teachers the confidence to facilitate their students' engagement with drama and theatre.

### **IMPACT: TENDERFOOT Going Forward**

Our research confirms that Tenderfoot is unique in providing a space where young people can make art, mentored by professional playwrights and theatre artists and without restriction. There are many models where young people collaborate with, or are facilitated by, professional artists in the making of original work, but Tenderfoot's focus on the 'young person as artist' makes it stand out. Access and inclusivity, as well as artistic excellence, are equal priorities for Tenderfoot. This dual focus is made possible by the collaboration between the arts and education sectors.

Tenderfoot has an exponential effect. In engaging with eight second-level schools each year, Tenderfoot works directly with fifty Transition Year students. There is a secondary positive influence on the 250 young people who engage with the work as a peer audience each year. There is also a tertiary effect in the development of an arts culture, a '**culture of creativity**', within the general population of participating schools.

It is estimated that, to date, Tenderfoot has directly and indirectly impacted more than 11,000 young people in the South Dublin County Council region. In developing a model to work with all thirty-five second-level schools in the South Dublin County Council region, Tenderfoot will develop a systematic and comprehensive 'culture of creativity' with a focus on the art of theatre.

The core of Tenderfoot is the written work. Our young writers craft the stories that they consider worthy of being told. When the written work is of a high quality, it opens a space for excellence, in terms of performance, design and production management. When the work is vibrant and vital, so too is the moment of live collision between audience and performance. We have, therefore, placed the written word at the centre of our five-year development plan.



*Tenderfoot in action, The Civic Theatre*

Following this period of research, **2020** will see:

- The implementation of three new *Writing For Theatre* programmes, catering for sixteen of South Dublin County's second level schools, under the mentorship of the following playwrights:

Dylan Coburn Gray and Amy Conroy  
Fionn Foley and Sian Ní Mhuirí  
Davey Kelleher and Michelle Read

It is anticipated that the number of new *Writing For Theatre* programmes will increase to six in 2021, offering engagement to all thirty-five of South Dublin County's second level schools. This staggered development is welcome for a number of reasons: it allows for the initial roll-out to be that of a pilot to facilitate learning; and it allows each writing group to be dual mentored. The benefit of dual mentorship includes diversity, reinforcement of opinion over the axis of right/wrong (in other words, it is healthy for

the young people to see their mentors both agree and disagree), and manageability of workload.

It is estimated that sixty young people will participate in the new *Writing For Theatre* programmes in 2020, with that number rising to one hundred and twenty by 2021. Each writing for theatre group will comprise eighteen to twenty young adults from five or six schools. They will spend a total of six contact days with their mentors in two blocks of three days. The first contact days will focus on introducing them to the discipline of writing for theatre. The focus will be on embodied learning through drama workshops with a focus on contemporary work. These first days will prepare our young adults for the task of writing a first draft of a play in their own time, with online support from their mentors. The focus of the second set of contact days will be on active feedback utilising group discussion, supported learning through active drama activities and one on one mentorship. Our Tenderfeet will then deliver a more developed draft of their play by an agreed date. The writing for theatre groups will culminate by coming together in The Civic Theatre for a public reading of a programme of work written by our young playwrights.

Twenty of our young playwrights will then take part in Tenderfoot's inaugural *Two Week Summer Intensive* under the mentorship of Veronica Coburn, Gavin Kostick and Davey Kelleher. The plays developed during this summer intensive will make up the performance programme for Tenderfoot in 2020/2021.

**2021** will see:

- IMPACT begin to consider professional theatre production for a young adult audience. The Civic Theatre will look at in-house presentation as well as off-site, in-school, production.
- IMPACT consider The Civic Theatre's first young writer commissions as a natural development of its work with Tenderfoot and Giant Wolf.

**2022** will see:

- IMPACT invite representatives from other local authorities and arts organisations to a forum to consider its progress.