



# THE VOICES BEHIND THE PICTURE

**EVALUATION**  
OCTOBER 2020





# Executive Summary



The partnership between In Motion Theatre Company and See Me was largely successful due to person-centred shared values.



The project lead offered her direction and expertise to participants enabling them to develop their writing skills.



The writers were keen to take part in the project because of their prior awareness of In Motion Theatre Company and reputation of See Me.



The online format of the project worked well for participants particularly during lockdown when high level physical restrictions were in place.



Participants also got involved in the project because they wanted to develop their writing skills and to talk about mental health.



The writers liked the diversity of the participant group which was partly enabled by the online format of the project – some may not have been able to take part for geographical reasons otherwise.



The project lead and participants benefited from The Voice Behind The Picture during the COVID-19 pandemic because it allowed people to connect with each other and develop an online community of support.



The content of the project worked well for participants – live and pre recorded workshops and one-to-one sessions. The writers liked the mix of group and one-to-one sessions and the pace of the project, despite its tight timescales.



The project effectively provided participants with a platform to have their voices heard and share stories about mental health.



The project provided participants with a creative outlet to share their stories during a challenging time.





Some writers preferred the online screening of the monologues, particularly those living with social anxiety and for whom a physical premiere might have been stressful.



The online screening allowed some audience members – particularly friends and families of participants – to more attend the event more easily, as they may not have made the journey to a theatre.



The Voice Behind The Picture appealed mostly to audience members with lived experience of mental health problems, therefore successfully engaging one of its core audiences.



Audiences reported that they attended the screening because of their interest in mental health and interest in theatre. They said that they would attend a future event to hear voices of lived experience in the context of theatre.



The project and screening allowed discussion about mental health according to audiences (77%) and participants. The event made a significant number of audience members think differently about mental health (54%). This was facilitated by powerful lived experience stories, recovery journeys, engaging characters and core mental health messages.



Future projects could consider how to engage more audience members who report no lived experience in order to create greater awareness and understanding of mental health problems.



Greater diversity among audience members is encouraged in the future by understanding better what audiences want through feedback, research and evaluation activities.



Consideration could be given to engaging audiences from more local authority areas across Scotland, through local and national communications and promotion.

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# 1. Background to the project



See Me partnered with Perth-based In Motion Theatre Company to deliver The Voice Behind the Picture, a five-week project that started during the COVID-19 lockdown. In Motion Theatre is a writing theatre company that was founded in 2016, that writes and tours its own work and supports and nurtures the writing of others.

The Director of In Motion Theatre Company approached See Me to discuss the potential of the programme. She had worked previously with SAMH in 2012 and was aware of the work of See Me. It was felt that See Me would be a good fit for this work, with its expertise in tackling stigma, starting conversations and addressing loneliness.

*“Lockdown has compounded these issues.”*

**Director, In Motion Theatre Company**

Over a series of live and recorded workshops and one to one development, the writers created five minute stories. The monologues were streamed as part of The Traverse Theatre’s Virtual programme in July 2020 and featured in the online Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival (SMHAF).

*“The project has created a real opportunity to open up conversations about mental health in a way that is engaging and meaningful for the participants and audiences.”*

**Social Movement Support Officer, See Me**

The project gave **14** emerging writers the opportunity to take part in a creative writing project with In Motion’s creative director and playwright. Focusing on the themes of loss, lockdown, identity and acceptance, the writers each produced a monologue that was performed by a professional actor and filmed. Many of the pieces drew on personal experiences of mental problems and associated stigma and discrimination.

## 2. Methodology

**MHF Scotland is the research, learning and evaluation partner for See Me. The MHF team is responsible for evaluating work delivered by See Me within specific programme settings and cross programmatically. This model ensures that most research and evaluation activities remain objective. The team works to demonstrate that programme outcomes are being achieved and is guided by the research question: what works to tackle and eliminate mental health stigma and discrimination? As part of its work with See Me, MHF evaluates the work it undertakes with partner organisations.**

A mixed methods approach was applied to this evaluation. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered to explore the process and impact of The Voice Behind the Picture. Quantitative data was gathered through an audience survey designed to capture the views of people who watched the monologues online as part of the Traverse Theatre's virtual programme and SMHAF online. Qualitative data was gathered from an interview with the director of In Motion Theatre Company (referred to as the project lead in this report) and through a focus group with the [14](#) writers and project participants.

Survey, interview and focus group questions were designed to gather views on the process and impact of The Voice Behind the Picture, using an outcomes focused approach. Quantitative data was cleaned, and descriptive analyses were undertaken using Microsoft Excel. Qualitative data was transcribed and analysed using NVivo software.

All participants involved in the research gave written and verbal consent to take part. Additionally, those who took part in interviews and the focus group gave consent for these to be audio recorded. Participants received information about the research process and purpose in advance.

### 2.1 Summary of data collection and limitations of the data

This report is based on relatively small samples of data. The audience survey received 13 responses, one individual interview with the project lead was undertaken and one focus group with the 14 writers was facilitated. However, both the project and evaluation were undertaken in a reasonably short period of time, and as such this report presents a useful picture of the work, its process and impact, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.



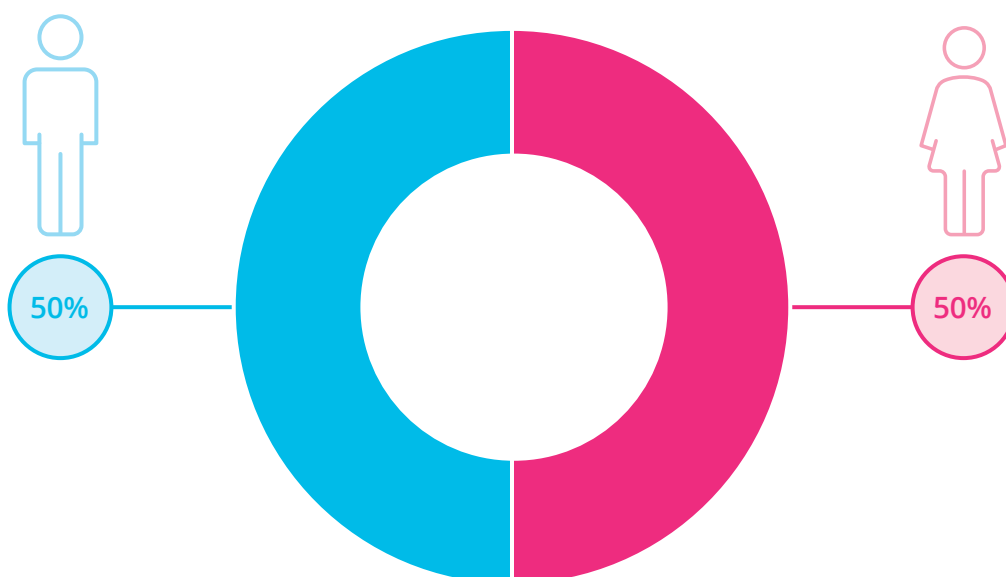
## 3. Audience demographics and characteristics

This section of the report explores the quantitative findings of the evaluation collected through the audience survey. It tells us a bit more about the characteristics of those who engaged with the project content.

### 3.1 Gender of survey respondents

Half of survey respondents were female, and half were male, which represents an equal split in gender among those who watched the monologues online.

Chart 1

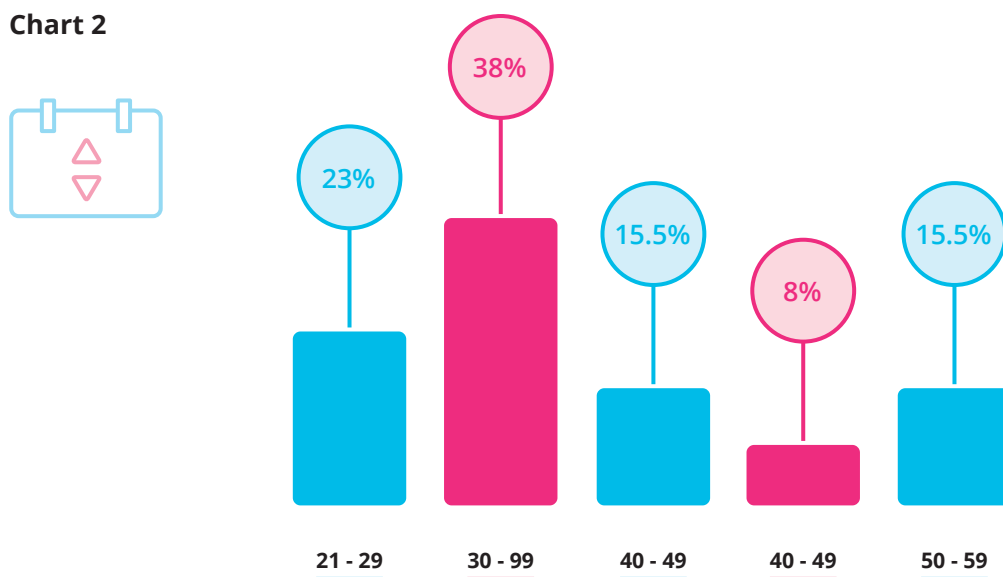




### 3.2 Age of survey respondents

Audience members were largely from the 30-39 age category (**38%**). Just under a quarter (**23%**) were aged 20-29, **15%** aged 40-49 and the same number were 60 or older. The smallest age group represented was 50-59 (**8%**).

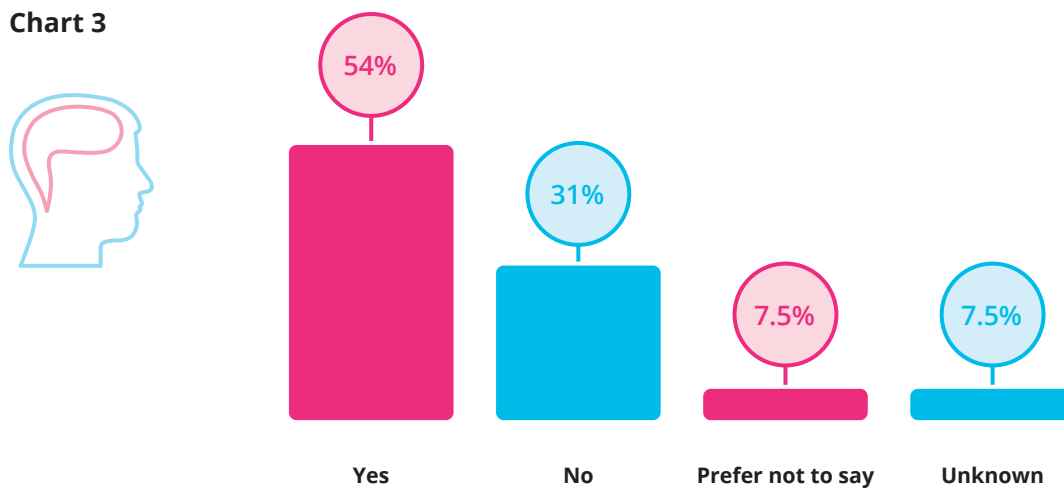
Chart 2



### 3.3 Lived experience of a mental health problem

The majority of people (**54%**) who engaged with The Voice Behind the Picture monologues reported that they had lived experience of a mental health problem. Just under a third (**31%**) said that they did not, while fewer preferred not to say (**7.5%**) or did not know (**7.5%**).

Chart 3







### 3.4 Local authority area

People who engaged with the monologues joined the screening from across five local authority areas. The majority lived in Fife (**53%**), just under a quarter (**23%**) from East Lothian and the remainder from Moray, Glasgow City and Aberdeen.

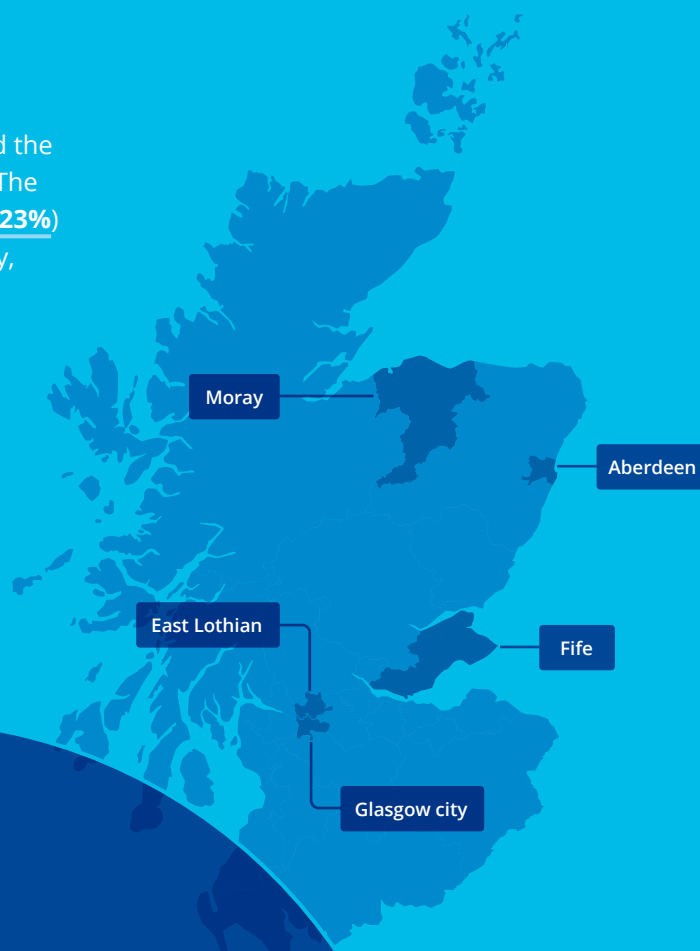
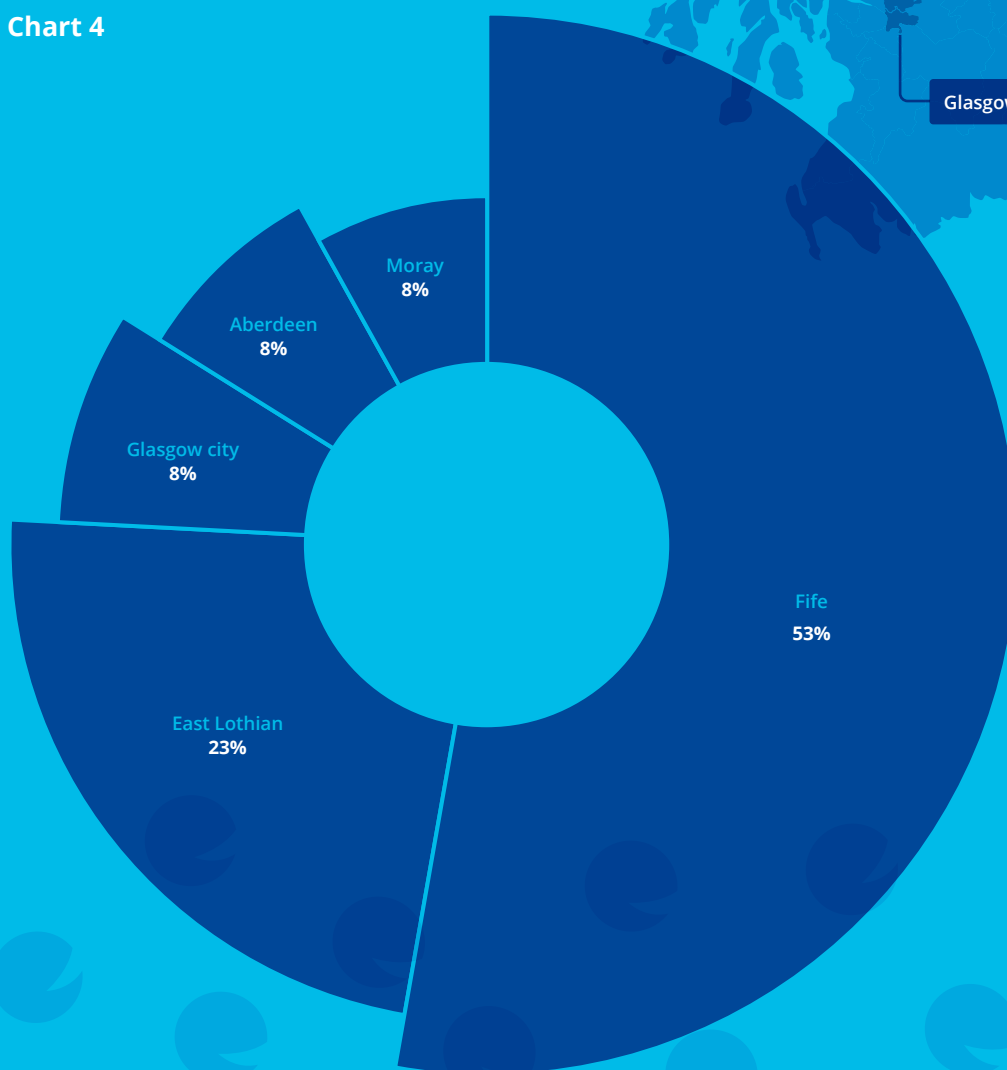


Chart 4



## 4. Key findings

The following section of the report presents the key findings of the audience survey, alongside the views of the project lead and participating writers, in terms of project process and impact.

### 4.1 Getting involved in the project

After approaching See Me, the project lead was signposted to the relevant See Me Support Officer and they discussed the project in more detail. The project was not See Me funded, rather it benefitted from the support, advice and expertise of See Me staff. For example, See Me provided communications and design support and supported project promotion.

*"It felt like See Me really wanted to support the work. It was about partnership and what See Me provided in kind. I felt like a part of the team."*

**Project lead**

Most of the project participants found out about The Voice Behind the Picture through social media sites, mainly Twitter and Facebook. Others saw it promoted in newspapers and newsletters. Around half of participants had been involved previously with In Motion Theatre Company and were keen to be part of another project.

### 4.2 Motivations for getting involved

We asked project participants why they got involved in The Voice Behind the Picture. As previously highlighted, some of the participants had worked with the project lead before and were keen for another opportunity to do that. Some had been involved in other writing projects and wanted to develop their skills further. Others felt that being involved in the project would help to address personal issues. A few participants lived in various remote and rural locations across Scotland which sometimes prevented them in getting involved in activities, therefore the online format of the project was appealing to people particularly in the context of lockdown and the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were keen to access the support and expertise that the project offered. And most wanted to connect with others and meet new people with common interests.

*"[The project lead] is really good at facilitating for my writing style personally."*

*"[It was too good an opportunity not to take]"*

*"I needed that focus and support and tangible outcome that the project offered."*

*"I am dealing with my own mental health. It was the opportunity to get help with that."*

**Project participants**

### 4.3 Effectiveness of project process

#### Writing workshops and one to one sessions

A series of online writing sessions were facilitated as part of the project. We spoke to participants to explore how effective these were. Views on the writing workshops were overwhelmingly positive. There were both live and pre recorded sessions that participants found useful. Being able to watch recorded workshops in their own time enabled participants to complete the project in a flexible way. Some participants stated that the workshops helped with creating their monologues and gave them inspiration when developing their work.

*"The recordings were very easy to reach...now I'm more familiar with technology."*

*"The workshops helped with the flow of the piece."*

*"The workshops were invaluable...really inspirational."*

**Project participants**

The writing workshops helped the participants to build an online community of support. The workshops "felt like a community" and reduced loneliness during lockdown, and in general "because writing can be a very lonely thing". Participants reported that the timing of the workshops worked well, given they occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, when people were spending more time at home.

All project participants said that they benefitted from the one to one sessions with the project lead. They felt fortunate to have the opportunity to work with the project lead because she provided additional support, expertise and solutions if their progress became challenging. While people valued the social interaction gained through the live

workshops, one to one sessions were useful for development of additional skills.

*"It was really lovely to have that process."*

*"It was really good learning."*

**Project participants**

Participants enjoyed the blend of recorded and live workshops and one to one sessions. They said that these worked well in terms of accessibility. They talked further about which sessions they found most beneficial to them. While some writers highlighted the memories workshop as being a particular highlight, they found all of the workshops valuable.

*"I think all of them contributed because I got a little bit out of most things."*

**Project participant**



### Online format of the project

Most project participants were comfortable with the online format of the project. While some writers were less familiar with online technology than others, on the whole the project worked well remotely. A few writers highlighted that geography – particularly for those living in remote and rural areas – may have prevented them from taking part in an in person project. They felt that this made the mix of participants more diverse than it would have been otherwise.

*"It didn't make a difference that it was online."*

*"It was unlikely that we would all get in a room together...we are all from quite different parts of Scotland and it was really interesting that there were writers that I would never have had the chance to be in the same project as."*

*"[The Zoom sessions] felt comfortable and natural and pressure free, which is a really important thing."*

#### Project participants

Participants recognised the unique benefits of an online project. They said that having their work online meant that the content reached more people than it would have otherwise. Some said that friends they had not been in touch with for some time contacted them to say that they watched the monologues online. People had the flexibility to watch the content when it suited them, rather than attend a one off physical screening.

*"To have a piece as part of a bigger event helps with publicity and reach. By itself it would not have got the same attention."*

#### Project participant

### Views on end production

The writers enjoyed the online screening of the monologues. For some, it helped with the anxiety of attending face to face events where their work is on show. They felt that the online nature of the premiere relieved the pressure that they may have felt otherwise. Participants agreed that the end production felt accessible.

Some writers said that they, their friends and families dressed up for the online screening as though they were going to the theatre. The end production gave participants and audience members the chance to be creative and immerse themselves in theatre and performance, despite lockdown.

*"I do not like attention or crowds. I enjoyed and felt confident about being part of the screening without having to go somewhere."*

*"It was a once in a lifetime opportunity to do something like that."*

*"I felt like I was at a premiere of a movie."*

*"It was just as good as anything that you see at the movies, so I was very pleased."*

#### Project participants

Participants were positive that the screening of the monologues would lead to other opportunities and positive connections around their work. They were able to easily share their monologues with others by sending a link which would not have been possible if the end production had not been online.

*"I was very happy with the production."*

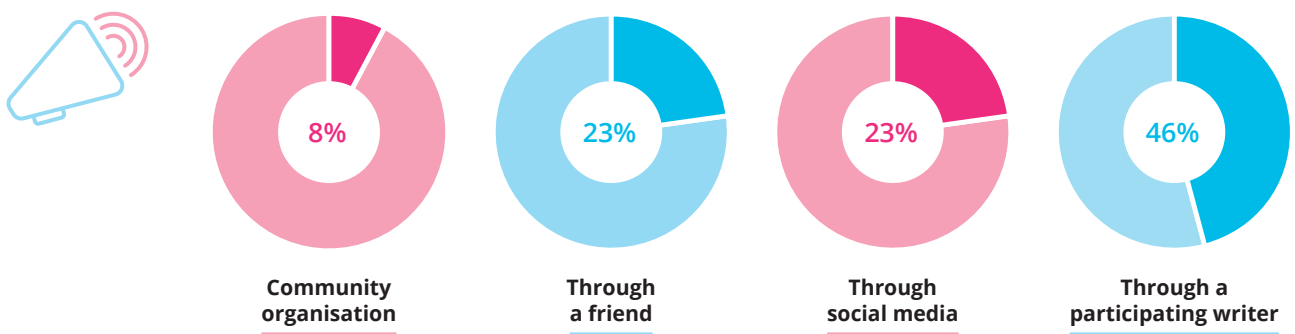
*"The production felt very well-rehearsed and well read."*

#### Project participants

## Attending the event

Audience members indicated that they found out about the event – the screening of the monologues created by participants – in a number of ways.

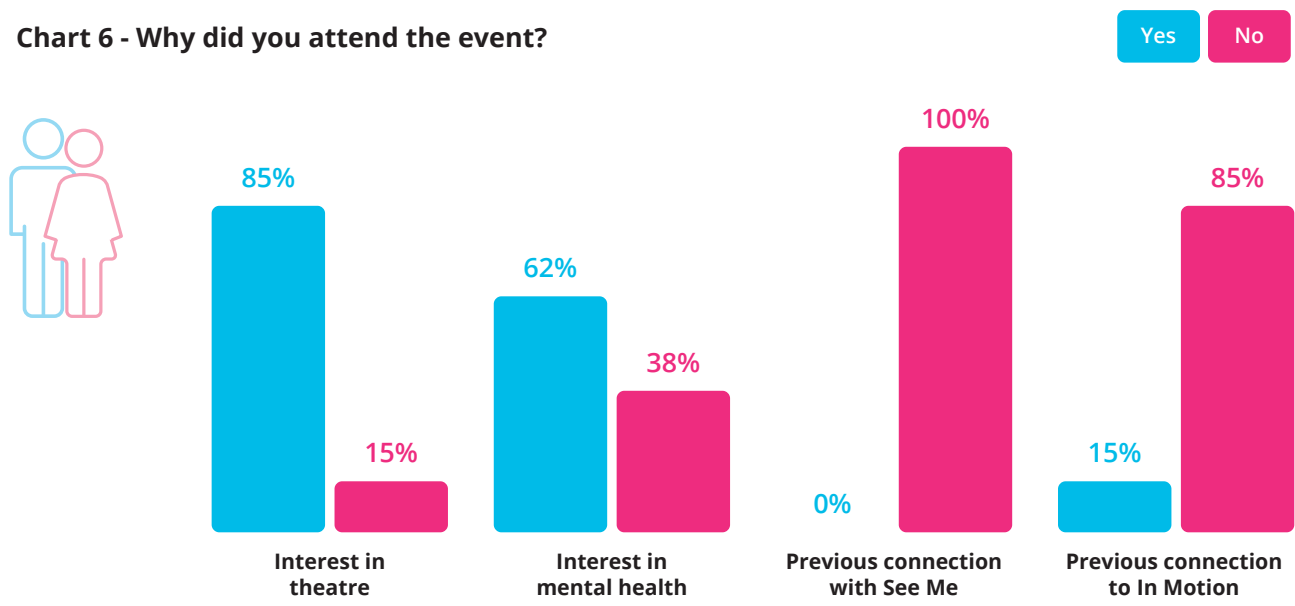
**Chart 5 - How did you hear about the event?**



Just under half of survey respondents (**46%**) found out about the project through one of the participating writers. Just under a quarter (**23%**) found out that the monologues were being created and screened through a friend and the same number through social media (primarily Facebook). One audience member found out about the project through a community organisation.

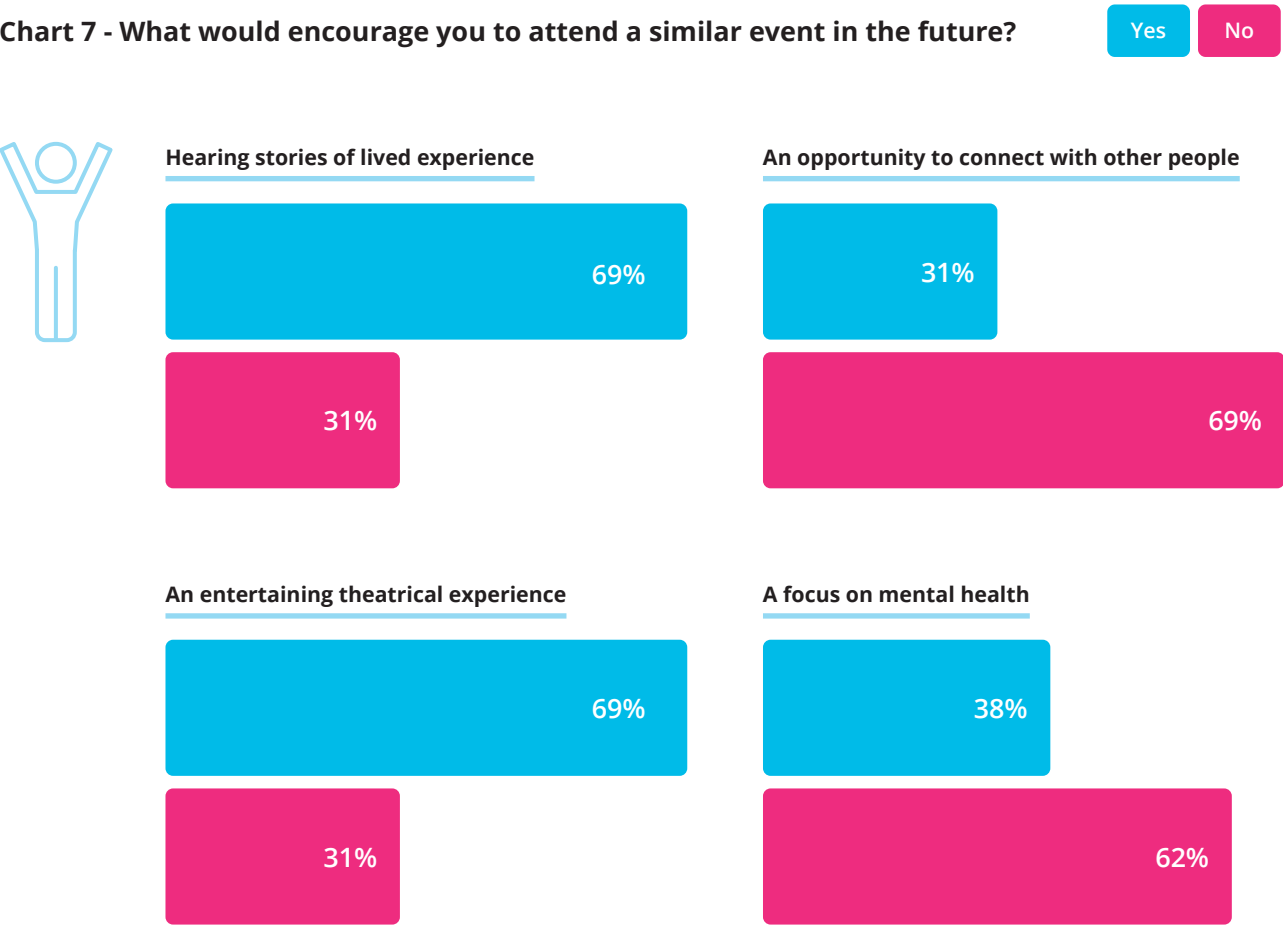
Survey respondents attended the screening of the monologues for a range of reasons. Most decided to engage because of their interest in theatre (**85%**). Almost two thirds (**62%**) attended because of an interest in mental health. A few survey respondents (**15%**) engaged with the project content because of a previous connection to In Motion Theatre Company.

**Chart 6 - Why did you attend the event?**





We asked survey respondents what would encourage them to attend a similar event in the future. A majority of respondents (**69%**) said that hearing stories of lived experience of mental health may encourage them to attend a similar event in the future. The same number of respondents reported that an entertaining theatrical experience would encourage them to take part in a similar event. Over a third (**38%**) of respondents would attend a similar event with a focus on mental health, and just under a third (**31%**) would attend to connect with other people.



This indicates that audiences might be best engaged in the future through events involving the voices of lived experience, a theatre-style event, a focus on mental health and connecting with people. However a majority of survey respondents also suggested that connecting with other people and a focus on mental health would not necessarily appeal to them.

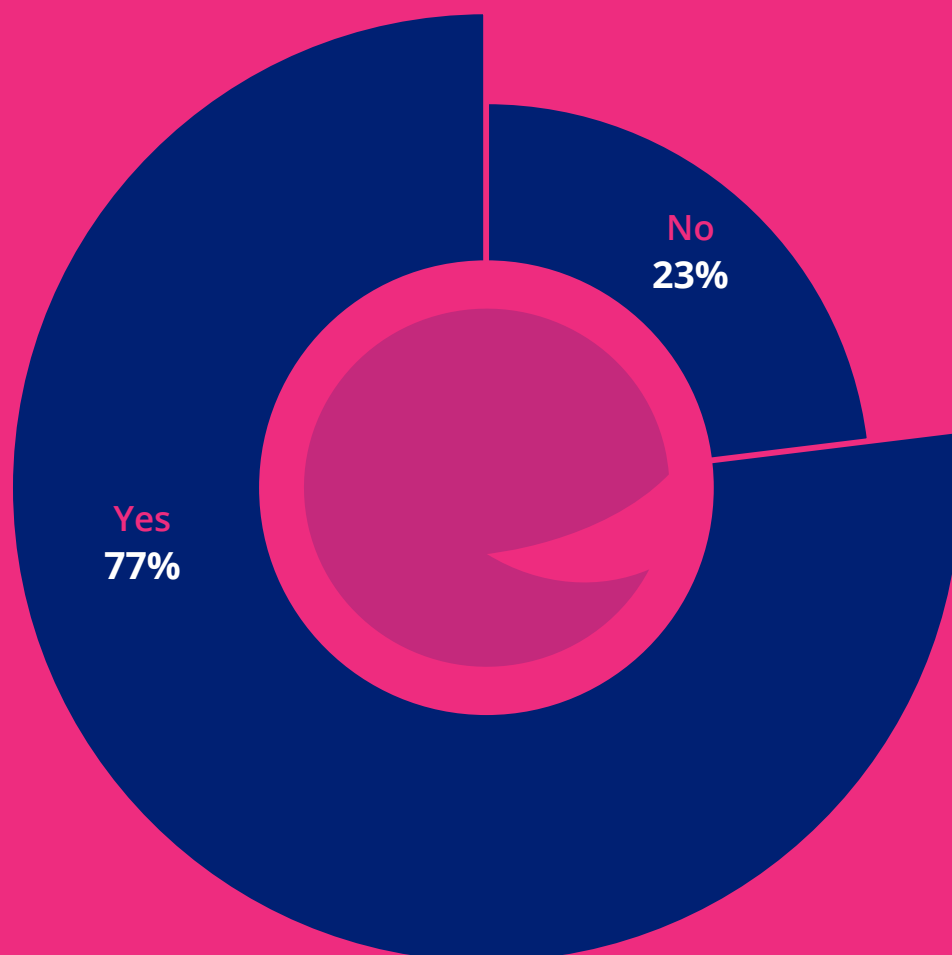


## 4.4 Impact of the project

### Talking about mental health

We asked survey respondents if they felt that The Voice Behind The Picture would encourage discussion about mental health. Over three quarters of respondents (**77%**) reported that the event would encourage discussion about mental health. Less than one quarter of respondents (**23%**) said that they were not sure if the screening would encourage discussion about mental health.

Chart 8 - Will the event encourage discussion about mental health?



This suggests that audience members who engaged with the monologues strongly felt that they would encourage discussion about mental health. Some commented further about why they thought this might be the case:

*"The wide diversity of stories are so powerful and have strong peer led recovery strategies."*

*"People will realise that writing about what makes you sad is cathartic and people might feel comforted to read and hear about it."*

*"It got my family and I talking about it lots after we watched it. My teenaged children and husband said it helped them understand some of my "black dog" days better."*

*"I hope so - it's good to be able to point people towards feelings I've had."*

#### Survey respondents

A few participants said that some family members and peers who watched the monologues had rarely engaged with mental health issues before, which resulted in a powerful experience for them. The messages conveyed through the monologues were even more powerful in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The fact that more people than ever are experiencing mental health problems and many for the first time, made this project pertinent.

*"I hope that it gives people who have seen it a sense of hope and optimism."*

*"There was a real need for a project like this."*

*"It made people analyse the meaning of my stuff. It was not explicitly billed as mental health and wellbeing, but people picked up on that."*

*"People talked about the character, and then the issues."*

#### Project participants

Some writers highlighted that the monologues empowered audiences to think differently and talk about their own mental health. They received feedback from family, friends and colleagues about their work that suggested that those who viewed the monologues identified with the issues and gained some comfort and reassurance from the core messages.

*"The audience could see themselves in different monologues."*

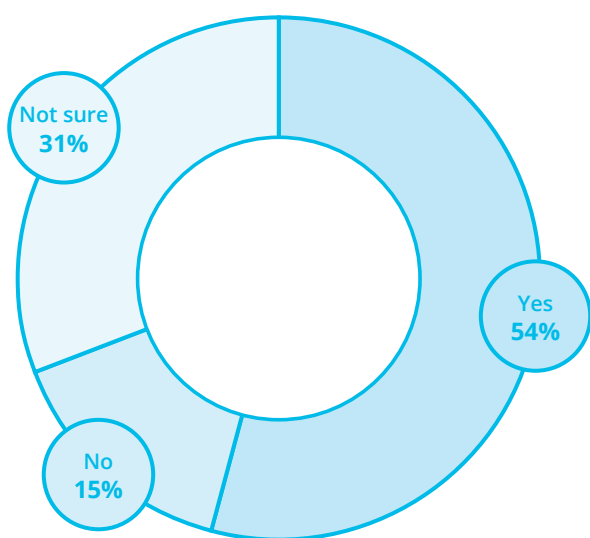
#### Project participant



## Impact on mental health

We asked survey respondents if The Voice Behind The Picture made them feel differently about mental health. Over half (**54%**) of respondents stated that the project did make them feel differently about mental health. Just under a third (**31%**) were not sure, and **15%** of respondents reported that the monologues did not make them think differently about mental health.

**Chart 9 - Did the event make you think differently about mental health?**



Some survey respondents commented on why the monologues made them feel differently about mental health:

*"It's opened my eyes to more complex recovery journeys."*

*"There is great support available for mental health and it's within reach."*

*"Brought it to a wider audience."*

**Survey respondents**

All project participants reported that the project had a positive impact on their mental health. Writing about personal and sometimes negative issues felt liberating for some. Participants said that the project gave them a platform to express

themselves in a way that worked for them. It allowed people to explore areas that they might not have done before.

*"I have suffered in the past with terrible anxiety, but I got things published and positive feedback... that's really helped transform my anxiety so that's another positive for my mental health."*

**Project participant**

The writers tackled a wide range of mental health problems and issues through their work, including isolation, bereavement, loss and negative emotions. Some described this as an empowering process enabling writers to talk more openly about their mental health and the mental health of others. Some participants said that these issues had been heightened by lockdown, therefore the timing of the project was ideal.

*"It opened up an area that I wouldn't have gone into...dealing with issues that others may have, it opens that up for me to explore."*

*"Yes, it did definitely...being able to take anger or sadness or negative things and transform them into something that's funny and entertaining, I definitely feel that I got the chance to express stuff, and I did feel much better after it."*

*"It helped to channel my anger and sadness."*

**Project participants**

Participants felt valued, having the opportunity to work with professional actors who performed their work. This improved their confidence in their own work. Having their stories performed by professional actors made it easier for some to share their personal experiences.

*"It's been a great chance to do one of my lifelong ambitions which was to get actors to perform my work."*

**Project participant**

### Feeling part of a community

The project came at a time when many of the participants most needed it. Some were feeling isolated at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some were at home alone with young children which was challenging at times. Therefore, the community element of the project was welcomed by participants. The project lead highlighted that The Voice Behind the Picture facilitated remote social contact, in place of social contact as it is normally understood, "which underpins the beginnings of behaviour change".

*"It was really nice to be able to talk to adults about something I'm interested in."*

*"It relived the pressure of being stuck in the house."*

*"It was a really supportive community."*

*"I really enjoyed the Zoom calls, the community aspect...I just really enjoyed it, felt part of it and it was just massively helpful from my perspective."*

*"It has been the highlight of lockdown for me."*

**Project participants**

### Impact of partnership working

Good communication between In Motion Theatre Company and See Me was essential to successful partnership working. The partnership was mutually beneficial. The project lead said that working with See Me and partners was important in terms of raising the profile of the work produced by writers and the visibility of In Motion Theatre Company. The online monologues received over **1,500** views and were featured as part of the 2020 Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival. Equally, the project helped to increase the visibility of See Me among new audiences.

*"It was made more appealing by the connection with See Me."*

**Project lead**

The project lead had clear expectations of what they wanted to achieve through delivering The Voice Behind the Picture. She was confident that working with See Me would support her to achieve the goals of the project. A partnership with See Me would frame the project in a wider context, in terms of mental health stigma and discrimination, helping people to better understand the purpose of the work.

*"It was very structured. The process was very well set out."*

*"My expectations [of working with See Me] were met 100%. They were exceeded."*

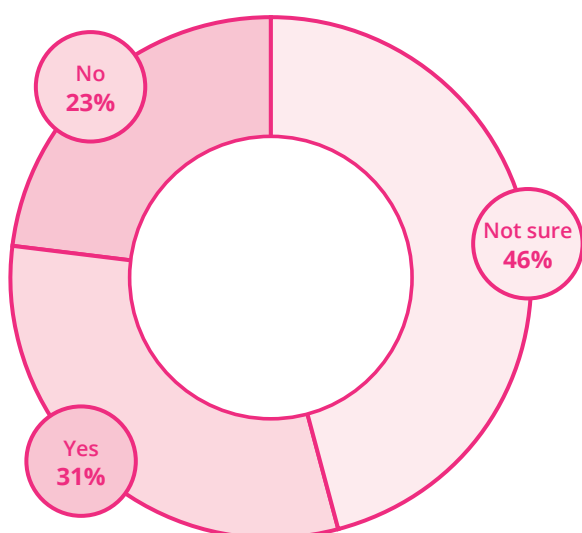
**Project lead**



### Inspired to do something differently

We asked survey respondents if The Voice Behind the Picture inspired them to do or change something. A significant minority of respondents (**46%**) were unsure and just under a third (**31%**) said yes. Of those who agreed, some said that the monologues had inspired them to “be more open minded”, learn new skills, do more creative writing and be more active.

**Chart 10 - Did the event inspire you to do or change something?**



Project participants also reported that The Voice Behind the Picture allowed them to do or change something. Most participants had explored writing previously however this project gave them the support and expertise they required to progress that. It was the first time that some of the participants had written about mental health problems. The workshops and one to one sessions gave writers the mechanisms and flexibility of access by which to improve their skills and take their work in a new direction. One participant has had a book of their writing published since taking part in the project and attributed the project for equipping them with “the confidence and motivation to do this”.

*“It was a once in a lifetime opportunity to do something like that and it’s certainly given me the inspiration to keep doing something similar.”*

*“It has inspired me to write more in the future.”*

**Project participant**

### Personal impact of project

For the project lead, the project offered her the opportunity to go “back to my roots, a move away from mainstream theatre”. The project offered her a clearer focus on what she wants to do – “work with organisations and people who don’t have a voice”. The COVID-19 lockdown inspired the project lead to think more about the direction of her work and who she wants to work with, such as more diverse audiences including different generations.

*“I want to work with people to allow them to have their voices heard.”*

*“Mainstream theatre can involve outreach activities, but outreach work doesn’t tend to merge with mainstream production. It is seen as an add on.”*

**Project lead**

Project participants talked about the personal impact of the project on them. As well as positive outcomes for mental health, the process was empowering, cathartic, improved confidence and self esteem and allowed people to try new things and explore new areas.

*“I exercised some insecure demons.”*

*“It improved my confidence.”*

*“It opened up areas for me to explore.”*

**Project participants**

Participants were also really proud of what they achieved. Some had thought that they would never be involved in a project like The Voice Behind the Picture. The fact that people took the time to engage in the screening of the monologues meant a lot to the writers. The positive feedback that writers received after the screening was invaluable and has inspired them to continue to write.

*"I am very proud to be part of it."*

*"Friends and family took time to watch it."*

*"A lot of my mates made the time to watch it."*

*"I got positive feedback."*

**Project participants**

### Feeling safe and comfortable

Participants were asked if they felt safe and comfortable taking part in The Voice Behind the Picture. All those who participated in the project agreed that they did feel safe and comfortable. Most attributed this to the direction, support and expertise of the project lead. This instilled participants with "confidence and positivity".

*"I felt vulnerable but safe."*

*"The Zoom calls felt comfortable and natural."*

**Project participants**

One writer explained that they live with an anxiety disorder, "so where the screens may seem like a disadvantage, it was actually an advantage for me, because as much as I love the theatre, going to the theatre is very stressful for me". Others agreed that having their work showcased online was easier than attending a physical screening. Watching the screening from the comfort of their own homes was reassuring for some participants, and this supported them to feel safe and comfortable.

*"The premiere was the right level of exciting and it felt really accessible and I felt like it increased my confidence to be able to share my work with the group...without that added pressure of having to go somewhere, because I can talk myself out of things."*

**Project participant**



# 5. Lessons learned

## 5.1 Key successes

### Engaging people with lived experience of mental health problems

The project was successful at recruiting participants and appealing to audience members with lived experience of mental health problems. The majority of writers and survey respondents (**54%**) reported that they had lived experience of mental health problems, suggesting the project was connecting successfully with one of its core audiences. The project also successfully appealed to audience members who reported no lived experience of mental health problems (**31%**), which is important in that it potentially increased knowledge and awareness among this group, about mental health problems.

### Project leadership

The project was created by the project lead – Director of In Motion Theatre Company – who approached See Me Scotland proactively as a best fit partner. See Me was keen to support the project because it was an innovative offering during lockdown that complemented its aims and objectives, and the relationship between the two organisations became firmly established. The project lead's ability to quickly develop an online project in response to the COVID-19 pandemic – to replace a previously planned face-to-face project – and to identify a suitable partner was crucial to the success of The Voice Behind The Picture.

Project participants frequently highlighted the leadership of the project lead as a key success factor of The Voice Behind The Picture. Many took

part in the project because they had worked with the lead before and benefitted from her direction. The writers found that working with the project lead improved their work because she gently guided them towards finding their own solutions to completing their monologues. Participants felt supported and confident to achieve their goals largely because of the project lead.

### Project support

The **14** emerging writers who took part in The Voice Behind The Picture reported that the support they received through the project was invaluable. In many cases, the project lead and support she offered was the main reason why participants were keen to take part. The project lead brought writers together, provided a forum for discussing their work and instilled a sense of confidence in them. Participants felt reassured by the support of the project lead on their journeys.

### Community of support and making connections

The writers quickly forged close relationships with their peers on the project, over a short space of time. They reported that they felt part of something bigger, and the workshops made them feel like part of a creative community. The writers described it as 'an online community of support' that allowed them to benefit from peer-to-peer contact and to share ideas to help progress their writing. Most said that it did not matter than the community was online. It was particularly important given the wider context of the pandemic that has increased isolation and loneliness for some.

The online community that was central to the project was particularly important and appreciated during lockdown, offering participants a distraction and focus at a time when they most needed it. Some participants said that the project helped them to make connections with new people and with people from their past. Some reconnected with people they had not been in touch with for some time, as a result of their work.

*"You've got someone...who's actually taking your writing seriously."*

*"You're putting it out there and it's getting discussed and it's not just me and my laptop."*

*"It did wonders for my confidence in my own writing."*

**Project participants**

### Partnership working

The project lead highlighted some specific successes of partnership working with See Me. These included "the openness of See Me" and the time that See Me staff were willing to dedicate to the project. For an organisation that has many demands on its time, See Me supported the project effectively. See Me was also willing to take a chance on a project that was slightly different. Both See Me and In Motion reported that both organisations held strong values in common which was key to the success of the partnership.

*"It is a mutually beneficial relationship...It feels like a proper partnership."*

*"See Me is one of the most incredible charities I have worked with, and I have worked many charities. See Me has been the best. See Me values people."*

**Project lead**

The project lead felt that The Voice Behind The Picture benefitted from See Me's reputation and expertise in the area of mental health stigma and discrimination. See Me supported The Voice Behind The Picture in kind, offering expertise, networks and contacts and communications and promotion capacity.

### Online delivery and project structure

The online model of project delivery developed by In Motion led to increased technology skills for staff and participants. New ways of working have been embraced and the project allowed people to continue to express themselves in a safe and comfortable environment. Participants benefitted from the online workshops and one-to-one sessions delivered by the project lead. They were found to be informative and engaging despite the fact that they were remote. Participants liked that the project adopted a peer led approach. The sessions were scheduled in a way that enabled the writers to form relationships with their peers and a community.

*"The structure was really useful."*

*"The community aspect of having the online opportunity is great. The reach is great, wider than a face to face project."*

*"There was a structure in the workshops that was very useful. I found the editing process at the end...that made me feel that it was taken step by step...and then I knew that it was done properly."*

**Project participants**

### Talking about mental health

Writers and audience members felt that the project and the screening of the monologues successfully facilitated open discussions about mental health. Over three quarters (**77%**) of survey respondents were confident that the event would encourage further discussion about mental health, because of the powerful stories, messages of recovery, identifying with particular characters' experiences, and creating greater awareness of mental health problems among audiences.

Writers felt that the monologues supported their friends and families to engage with mental health issues where they may not have done before. The audience survey revealed that a majority of those who watched the monologues (**54%**) thought differently about mental health as a result. Some said that the monologues "opened their eyes" and brought mental health "to a wider audience".

Some writers reported that they felt "liberated" by expressing their stories through their monologues. They felt able to articulate personal experiences of bereavement, loss, isolation and mental health problems. Having the opportunity to talk openly about their own mental health and the mental health of others made the process empowering for writers.

### End production

The writers and audience members enjoyed engaging in the screening of the monologues. Communications and promotion of the screening created an excitement around then event. Participants described how they, their family and friends got dressed up as though they were going to the theatre for a premiere. Some participants who struggled with social anxiety felt more comfortable watching the monologues from the comfort of their own homes. This worked well for those who feel uncomfortable being the centre on attention and meant that they could fully enjoy and

appreciate watching the screening. Participants felt confident that the screening of their monologues would result in further opportunities for them and their work.

### Social contact

With social contact in its traditional sense being much more challenging during the pandemic, this project gave See Me and the project lead the chance to explore the potential benefits of remote social contact. While the survey response rate was relatively low, those who did respond indicated that The Voice Behind The Picture made them feel differently about mental health (**54%**), in that it made people more aware of different mental health conditions and recovery journeys, that stigma and discrimination is still pervasive in society and they developed a greater understanding of the issues. One respondent commented that the monologues brought issues around mental health to a wider audience.

Survey respondents reported that The Voice Behind the Picture encouraged discussion about mental health (**77%**), with its variety of powerful stories. Some commented that these discussions allowed audience member to understand the issues from the perspective of someone with lived experience of mental health problems. Anecdotally the monologues got family and friends of writers talking about the characters and content in a way they might not have done otherwise.

### Additional successes

Working with professional actors was a key success of the project for participants. The participants also enjoyed refining their writing skills through the project. The project created a safe space for writers to freely tell their stories. Being part of something social and creative, particularly during lockdown, was positive for the writers. Participants highlighted the importance of the



creative foundation of the project for them. Those who took part also found it rewarding to think that people who watched the monologues might have experienced improved mental health as a result.

*"I learned so much from it at a time when I needed it."*

*"It gave me a sense of creative ability that I had hidden."*

*"It is a good way to meet people, to get our work out there."*

*"It definitely does give you confidence and helps you flourish."*

*"This is my purpose."*

**Project participants**

## 5.2 Challenges and improvements

The project lead and project participants encountered few challenges during the project. A few experienced some technical challenges in relation to using online technology (Zoom). It was suggested that an initial project workshop to introduce participants to new technologies would be useful in the future.

Another improvement to the project suggested by a participant was introducing a 'buddying system' or peer support aspect, whereby workers could work in pairs or small groups for more focused discussions depending on their interests and on the nature of their work.

*"It would be useful to build that into future projects. This would add a peer support element."*

*"Building your groups and relationships might make it easier to ask questions if you are not as comfortable in a wider group."*

**Project participants**

The tight timescales for the project were challenging for the project lead and project participants but were outwith anyone's control and determined by the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to lockdown the Traverse Theatre had already been booked for a screening (for a different project). The reformatted online version of the project needed to align with these timescales, which resulted in a shorter recruitment period. On the flipside, the project lead acknowledged that tighter timescales "keeps the energy going, and keeps people going".

*"Another couple of weeks would have been beneficial to edit and tie things up."*

*"Nothing could have worked better except having longer timescales."*

**Project lead**

## 6. Recommendations

### Understanding audience motivations

It is recommended that MHF, See Me and partners continue to develop a better understanding of the motivations of audiences in order to grow online audiences and offer them the experiences they want. We have learned from this project that audiences want to hear stories of lived experience in the context of a theatre production, therefore this is useful to build on. MHF, See Me and partners should continue to explore with audiences what they expect to gain from these types of events. If possible, this should extend beyond surveys, to focus groups and interviews where possible.

### Growing diversity and reach

The survey findings revealed that the project successfully engaged almost equal numbers of audience members in terms of gender, and a significant number with lived experience of mental health problems (54%). The project lead and See Me might want to think about how they can attract a more diverse age range, particularly among 40-49, 50-59 and 60 or older. Thought could also be given to increasing the project's geographic reach and capturing the attention of audiences from across a wider range of local authority areas.

### Reframing the end production

Audience members reported that they were less likely to feel encouraged to attend a similar event if it was primarily focused on mental health (62%) or presented as an opportunity to connect with other people (69%). However audience members were

impacted by the powerful stories told through the monologues, as demonstrated by the 69% of audience members who reported that they would attend a similar event to hear stories of lived experience in the context of a theatre production.

### Lived experience stories

It is recommended that See Me and In Motion consider how future screenings are framed. It was recognised by both partners that audiences connected with the monologue characters first, followed by the issues they were experiencing. This appears to be an appropriate approach, as audience members reported that an event with an explicit focus on mental health might not be as appealing as an event that offered the opportunity to engage in lived experience stories. While essentially both expose mental health problems, presenting these in the context of lived experience stories seems to be more appealing to audience members.

### Future participant opportunities

It is recommended that In Motion Theatre and See Me Scotland continue to work together to provide more opportunities for people to take part in creative projects focused on mental health. There is a clear demand for this type of work, and for providing this sort of opportunity for those who would not otherwise get the chance to participate. This project demonstrates that creative activities such as writing and theatre are effective vehicles for mental health messages. It is recommended that See Me Scotland and In Motion Theatre Company pursue funding opportunities that will

allow them to continue to offer these types of creative development opportunities that tackle mental health stigma and discrimination.

### Project leadership

All participants were keen to work with the project lead again in the future. They all had a very positive experience and produced work that they are proud of, with the right support and expertise, in the right way, at the right time. The writers recognised that taking part in the project elevated their work and gave them a platform to showcase it which they may not have had otherwise. The writers would like to take part in more opportunities like this again, as “there are other things I’d like to say”.

*“I’d be very sad if I thought this would be my only opportunity to do something like this again.”*

**Project participant**

### Future participation opportunities

Some participants would like to see their monologues developed further through a follow up project. This could involve linking the characters in their individual monologues into a wider and larger piece of theatre work. Others wanted to go to create a series of their own monologues. The project lead was committed to developing future participation opportunities.

*“I want to take that forward; I want to keep the group connection going.”*

*“This is just the beginning, it hasn’t just ended, it has opened up more and new doors.”*

**Project lead**

### Developing creative writing

Most participants were keen to continue to build on their writing skills and experience, inspired by the project. Most wanted to take part in similar projects in the future, that offer a community environment, expert support and a creative platform to share the issues that are important to them. Additionally, a few of the writers had work published since taking part in the project and wanted to continue to build on this.

*“I want to continue to develop my writing.”*

**Project participant**

### Peer mentoring

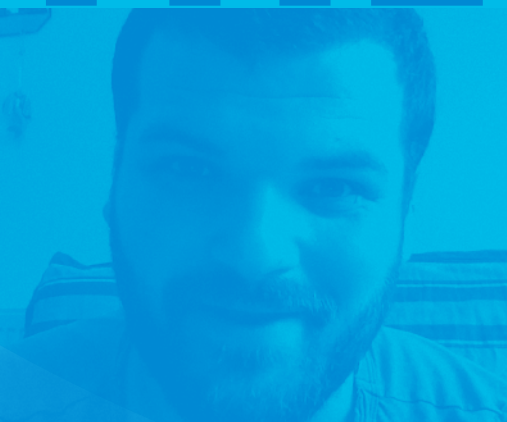
It is recommended that future similar projects incorporate small group working or a ‘buddying system’, as suggested by some participants, to help them develop their writing further. Some felt that this would help them develop greater focus and clarity around their work and would be beneficial for those who do not feel comfortable working in larger groups all of the time.

### Using online technology

Future projects might benefit from an initial session on using technology to familiarise those less used to online platforms and communication tools, and to allow people to refresh their skills as required. This could be an opt in session for those who feel that they would benefit from it. It could free up time for creative development sessions, which becomes more important when working within tight timescales.



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