

A NIGHT AT THE MANGLED MARE

Youth Empowerment Project

**A Colchester City Community Production Celebrating Neurodiversity,
Teen Mental Health and Youth Empowerment**

A YEAR-LONG PRACTICAL CREATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

A Night at the Mangled Mare will form the centrepiece of a year-long intensive practical education programme for up to 70 SEN and neurodivergent young people and young adults aged 12-18 from across the Colchester city region.

Delivered through Underdog Crew Studios and its Essex County Council-funded SENtrepreneur programme, the project will give participants the opportunity to work within a professional creative environment while developing skills across theatre, filmmaking, music, event management, technical production and promotion.

The programme will culminate in a three-night public theatrical performance run, giving participants the chance to contribute to a major original stage production and see their work presented to a live audience.

UP TO 70	AGES 12-18	50+ DISCIPLINES	3-NIGHT RUN
Participants	SEN & neurodivergent	Creative industry skills	Public performances

PROJECT ELEMENTS

Practical learning across the full life cycle of a professional production

Participants will have the opportunity to learn across more than 50 creative industry disciplines and practical production skills, including:

Performance, Story and Music

- Acting and ensemble performance
- Singing and vocal development
- Music creation and live performance
- Script development and storytelling
- Movement and choreography

Design, Making and Technical Production

- Set design and construction
- Props and scenic artwork
- Costume and makeup
- Puppetry, animatronics and practical effects
- Lighting and sound
- Projection and digital media

Film, Management and Audience Development

- Filmmaking and live event capture
- Stage management
- Event planning and production management
- Marketing, social media and audience development
- Front-of-house and customer experience

Every participant will receive a professional certificate of accomplishment following the project, recognising their contribution, skills development and practical experience.

The project will operate as a year-long creative apprenticeship in the practical science of professional theatrical production, filmmaking, event management and promotion. Outstanding participants may also be considered for future work experience, mentoring and internship opportunities with regional theatres and creative organisations, subject to availability and partnership agreements.

WHY THIS PROJECT MATTERS

Breaking down barriers to work experience, employment, internships and further education

Many marginalised, at-risk and neurodivergent young people face significant barriers when trying to access work experience, employment, internships and further education.

These barriers can include anxiety, low confidence, disrupted education, communication difficulties, sensory needs, limited local opportunities and a lack of accessible routes into professional environments.

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN DESIGNED TO BREAK DOWN THOSE BARRIERS.

By placing young people within a supported, ambitious and professionally managed creative production, participants will gain hope, confidence and critical employment skills in a genuine real-world environment.

They will be mentored by award-winning industry professionals and encouraged to discover where their strengths, interests and talents can lead.

Key Benefits

Confidence and Self-Belief

Participants will be supported to take creative risks, develop independence and recognise the value of their own ideas and abilities.

Real Work Experience

Young people will contribute to a genuine production with real schedules, deadlines, audiences and professional standards.

Mentoring

Young people will work alongside experienced professionals from theatre, film, music, design and production, gaining insight into professional expectations and creative career pathways.

Social Connection and Belonging

The project will create a safe, collaborative community where young people can build friendships, feel valued and contribute to something larger than themselves.

EMPLOYABILITY AND PROGRESSION

Critical workplace skills, professional evidence and routes into the creative industries

Employability Skills

The project will develop practical workplace skills including:

• Teamwork	• Communication
• Timekeeping	• Reliability
• Problem-solving	• Organisation
• Responsibility	• Leadership
• Creative thinking	• Self-advocacy

Routes into Employment

The project will create meaningful pathways towards:

- Work experience
- Volunteering
- Supported internships
- Apprenticeships
- Further education
- Employment
- Freelance creative work
- Technical theatre
- Film and media production
- Music and live events

Portfolio Development

Participants will leave with practical evidence of their contribution, which may include:

- Production credits
- Photographs
- Video footage
- Creative work
- References
- Certificates
- Portfolio material
- Examples of completed tasks and responsibilities

THE CASE FOR ACTION

A structured bridge between education and the creative industries

SEN and disabled young people experience a steep drop-off in participation after education and are substantially more likely to become not in education, employment or training than their non-disabled peers.

National evidence shows that disabled young people are significantly more likely to be NEET, while autistic young people remain particularly vulnerable to unemployment, isolation and poor post-education outcomes.

Although no single robust Colchester-specific SEND NEET figure is currently available, the wider national and regional evidence demonstrates a clear need for practical, supported transition programmes that build confidence, vocational skills and genuine links to employment.

This project responds directly to that need by providing a structured bridge between education and the creative industries.

Why Colchester Needs This

Colchester has a strong cultural identity, established theatres and a growing creative sector, yet many SEN and neurodivergent young people still struggle to access meaningful professional opportunities.

By bringing together theatre-making, filmmaking, event management, music, technical production and promotion within one year-long programme, A Night at the Mangled Mare will provide a distinctive local pathway into the creative industries.

It will also create a major public celebration of neurodiversity, teen mental health and youth empowerment.

PROJECT SUMMARY

One ambitious production - many routes to confidence, skills and employment

At a Glance

- Up to 70 participants
- Ages 12-18
- SEN and neurodivergent focus
- Colchester city region
- Year-long intensive practical programme
- More than 50 creative disciplines and skills
- Mentoring from award-winning professionals
- Professional certificate of accomplishment
- Real-world production experience
- Three-night public theatrical performance run
- Potential routes into work experience and internships
- Clear pathways towards further education and employment

Core Aim

The aim of the project is not simply to teach young people about theatre.

IT IS TO GIVE THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME PART OF THE COMPANY THAT CREATES IT.

A Night at the Mangled Mare will use professional theatrical production as a vehicle for confidence, skills, belonging, progression and long-term youth empowerment.

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