FOCUS EVENT AGM report

During the course of this past year the committee were aware of a worrying trend in the group, our lack of ability to attract new members to the group.

Also , after a run of plays that, for varying reasons didn’t hit the right spot with our audiences, we started to doubt our policy on choosing plays. We have a play reading committee, but our indecision has affected the relationship between the main committee and the sub-committee. We have a policy of presenting a mixed balance of plays throughout a season, but the problem seemed to be one of, do we choose plays to suit the people available or do we take a flyer and choose plays, then find the cast.

We all know the difficulty we had in casting the sole younger male part in Relative Values.

We were beginning to, in a way, doubt ourselves.

It was broached that we hold a focus event to find out from people, primarily from outside the group, how they viewed us, and how we could improve ourselves, to hopefully attract new members.

It’s worth telling you, at this stage that, over the course of the last few years we have had a constant stream of people enquiring, via principally the web-site, to know more about the group. We have in place a membership structure that responds quickly, in a positive, friendly, informative manner to such requests. Lorna has been dutifully doing this, arranging to meet people down at rehearsals, keeping them informed etc but, either people don’t show, or they don’t take the bait and join us. It could be that, if we are in midst of rehearsals, there is nothing really positive for them to get involved with. It could be that their enquiry was on a whim and not too serious. Maybe they hadn’t thought through the involvement and commitment required. We’re not mind readers.

The focus event seemed like an opportunity to try and get to the nub of the problem, hopefully.

We restricted the numbers to 10 to 12 as, on reviewing a specialist website, it advised that smaller numbers are invariably better to get responses from, to draw out information and ideas. We invited Jacquie Steadman from NODA, with her unique amateur theatre experience to run the event. I obviously attended, Gillian as a note taker in addition to myself on the flip chart and Lottie as valuable assistance. It was a busy evening for us 3.

The attendees were a mix of people who had enquired to know more about us, audience members plus one person from the Barnet Festival organisation.

Following the event I reported to the main committee the findings and my views how we could carry forward some of the suggestions. The event lasted just over 2 hours with loads of enthusiasm and a flow of ideas.

MEMBERSHIP LEAFLET Belmont has a current membership leaflet and the feeling was that this needs revamping, dated, too cluttered. A need to emphasis more the opportunities to get involved in set construction, lighting, marketing and bring the social aspect of the group to the fore. **We are currently looking at revamping this. We have had the current leaflet for at least 3 years so time for a change.**

PEOPLES PERCEPTION OF AMATUER DRAMA they thought amateur dramatic could give the impression of low budget, a lack of taking risks, only as good as your last show, formulaic style of plays and playing safe.

OPEN AUDITIONS Liked the idea as a way of attracting new members

MOTIVE FOR SENDING IN THE ENQUIRY people sent in enquiry to try and develop an interest in theatre, develop a platform for the future**. Jacquie couldn’t quite pin down why the people who were there hadn’t followed up the invitation Lorna sent. So in a way didn’t resolve that puzzle.**

PUBLICITY From those of our audience who were there, they had no adverse comment on our mailchimp email hits, a good reminder. Compliments on our publicity. Suggested we hand out leaflets outside stations, supermarkets, in shopping centres. Maybe in costume. Our banner outside Sainsbury’s was mentioned.

SYLLABUS Research school syllabus as to plays students would be interested in seeing or being part of.

DISCOUNT OFFERS Book a whole season in advance at a discount

BOX OFFICE Provide a facility to book specific seats online, everything these days is instant.

MARKETING Contact recently graduated people asking them to get involved developing marketing opportunities. Assisting us would look good on their CV.

COMMUNICATION This seemed to be a major issue. Why didn’t I know about this????seemed to be the constant query .We have a data-base that we have built up over the past few years of some 700 people and we will, in future be sending out a regular newsletter/information sheet to these 700 people asking for help, advertising open auditions, workshops, open days,etc. **We sent out our first monster issue about 3 weeks ago and hopefully we will send these out every 6 weeks, as and when we have events to advertise or information that people need to know about.**

NEWSLETTER They asked about maybe receiving a copy of our newsletter, even a sanitised version. Maybe the monster newssheet just spoken about will suffice.

FACEBOOK Belmont currently only has 117 followers. I feel we need to raise this number to over 500 by the end of the year. **Spoken to Dawn about this as the most prolific Face book person, along with Malcolm, in Belmont but, even though I know very little about these things, can I ask that you all actively get your friends family, members of other theatre groups to be FRIENDS of Belmont as this is the way forward to communicate. Surely Belmont should have loads of friends.**

SOCAIL MEDIA The following sites were mentioned Gum Tree Reachskill.org.uk which is a volunteering website to advertise for people to assist with marketing, set construction etc etc. Also mentioned was Snapchat**. I leave this for others to develop or comment on. We need younger minds/enthusiasm to pitch in and develop these vital aspects of modern communication.**

PUMP HOUSE Promote ourselves more to other groups that use the Pump House. We already are one of the most proactive groups that use the theatre. **Frankie attends their regular meetings and our voice is heard. We have a good relationship with the publicity person from Pump House Theatre and we are regulars at their brochure stuffing publicity mornings. Also some of our members work behind the bar. The Pump House is worth about 40 tickets per show so we need to develop this association.**

YOUTH THEATRE Getting youngsters involved is very important. Need to associate ourselves with a youth theatre school. Develop a relationship. Margaret Howard Theatre School , Bushey was mentioned. **I have written to the principal to try and set up a meeting so we can slowly develop a relationship. Initially I see this as advertising our/their events. Maybe it can become more. They have responded in a positive way and we’ll be meeting soon.** The focus meeting also suggested a NEW FACES production, advertising for young talent to come along and be part of a special youth geared production, directed/financed by Belmont with a production at the Pump House. This would be extra to our season. **Needs loads of research with a fresh energetic approach from Belmont. A long term project**

COLLEGES Approach West Herts Drama College plus Stanmore Drama College to advertise our shows, our auditions, play readings etc One of the people at the focus event offered to help by approaching Stanmore College. **Will follow up to try and get our Power point presentation in there.**

WORKSHOP FACILITIES LOCALLY Apparently ASDA and TESCO have rooms/facilities for hire to enable local groups to mount promotional events. That way we go out into the community, makeup workshops, act out a play, Power Point Presentation, advertise our shows. **Gillian is researching the cost/availability. Needs plenty of advertising and energy in the group, Could be a way of reaching joe public .**

NEW WRITERS Liaises with local writing groups with a view to putting on plays.

LOCAL PRESS Appeal for people with marketing skills to join us.

FOCUS EVENT we were applauded for holding the event and maybe, they suggested, we should hold more, for specific groups, like audience, current members and patrons. **I and the committee are always receptive, throughout the years to suggestions from the members, so there is an ongoing forum for you to make your views known, but, if you felt a special focus evening would be of value we can look into that. We would anticipate that you would be prepared to pitch in and help with anything you suggest. The AGM is really your opportunity to make your views known, suggest ideas and we definitely will consider these during the year.**

FEEDBACK They required feedback from Belmont as to how we will move forward in the light of the ideas/suggestions put forward. The audience members there fully appreciated the standard of our shows and clearly want the group to succeed and go from strength to strength. I have reported back to them, much in the same vein as I’m reporting to you this evening. There was enthusiasm there and a desire for the group to continue and blossom. **We will keep them informed.**

MY COMMENTS I know that most of the ideas they came forward with were ones we have muted ourselves over the years and have tried or maybe not had the manpower to implement. Others were new ideas. I felt their enthusiasm and ideas need to vigorously investigated and most implemented, even if it takes time to think them through. Some are long term projects that we can slowly develop.

I feel their ideas, and the commitment from the people here tonight, could be a new manifesto for the group, an opportunity to look at ourselves and realise we have a lot going for us.

Our organisational skills were praised by the John from Barnet Festival.

We are a welcoming group, hard working dedicated committee, excellent sets, variety of quality plays, good newsletter, events throughout the year, very strong financially etc etc. We now a new fresh set of objectives and aims for the coming year. We have 2 plays planned ahead and will continue that process with future plays and directors.

We mustn’t forget that we have excellent audience figures, a slight dip recently but we are definitely on the road back.

I was very positive throughout the focus evening, could have been easy to keep saying “we’ve tried that, nobody responded” or “that costs too much money” or “we haven’t the time” etc etc

The object of the evening was to listen to ideas, from complete strangers, as to how we could possibly improve ourselves. We need now, all of us , to act on their ideas plus our own thoughts and ideas..