

photos by Sarah Hickson

Ruth Melville Research

TRUTH TO POWER CAFE

IMPACT STUDY

Produced for *London Artists Project* by Catherine Doran and Dr Ruth Melville

ACT UP LONDON

CE=
TH
TICAL
S

UNITED
IN
ANGER

NO
2
S
U
L
E
N
C
E





Contents

4	—————	Section 1: Introduction
8	—————	Section 2: Impacts on participants' wellbeing
12	—————	Section 3: Impacts on participants' relationship with power
16	—————	Section 4: Participants had meaningful experiences
24	—————	Section 5: Conclusions and recommendations
26	—————	Appendices



About Truth to Power Café

Truth to Power Café is a nonpartisan performance event and digital storytelling platform inspired by the political and philosophical beliefs of Nobel prize winning playwright Harold Pinter and his Hackney Gang.

The project has been developed with director Jen Heyes through an intergenerational collaboration between theatre maker and HIV+ activist Jeremy Goldstein (50), whose late father Mick Goldstein was in the Gang, and sole surviving member of the Gang, poet polymath Henry Woolf (90).

A life time of letter writing between the Gang was acquired by the Harold Pinter Archive at the British Library in 2014. Their letters, now on public record, have inspired the concept and development of the project.

For over sixty years, the Hackney Gang were on the side of the disempowered and the occupied. It is these people and their allies we invite to take part in the project, thereby offering a platform to those who may not feel that they have a voice in society, and feel disempowered by the establishments of power, which can leave people feeling voiceless.

London Artists Projects' mission is to speak truth to power to audiences hungry for live and authentic moments of joy, beauty and meaning. Founded by theatre maker and HIV+ activist Jeremy Goldstein in 2002, LAP has commissioned and co-created work with many celebrated artists, winning awards including the Evening Standard, Scotsman Fringe First, London Cabaret and BBC Audio Drama awards. LAP projects have championed underrepresented voices and new forms of artistic and political expression for two decades, reaching audiences of 500,000 world-wide.

www.londonartistsprojects.co.uk

Truth to Power Café

Created by Jeremy Goldstein
Directed by Jen Heyes Verse, Henry Woolf
Photography Sarah Hickson (UK) Kate Holmes (Australia)
Banners Ed Hall **Lighting** Nigel Edwards **Video** Conor McMahon
Music David Bowie / Sven Rätzke

A London Artists Projects production developed with the Harold Pinter Archive at the British Library, London; Soho Theatre, London; Theatre in the Mill, Bradford; Cast, Doncaster; Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games; and Leeuwarden European-Friesland European Capital of Culture in The Netherlands.

photo by Sarah Hickson



Section 1 / Introduction

About this report

This report is an impact assessment of Truth to Power Café, it covers events between 2017 and 2020 and focuses on the impact that taking part in the events process has had on participants during this time. It considers specific outcomes identified by project creator and director of London Artists Projects Jeremy Goldstein and set out in the Story of Change developed with the Truth to Power Café team by Ruth Melville in late 2019 ([Appendix 1](#)).

The report is structured as follows:

- Section 1 sets out the context of Truth to Power Café, our approach to the impact assessment, and the Story of Change which outlines the aimed for outcomes.
- Section 2 covers impacts on participants of Truth to Power Café in terms of their wellbeing.
- Section 3 explores impacts on participants of Truth to Power Café in terms of their relationship with power.
- Section 4 explores the experience of taking part in Truth to Power Café, and feedback from participants in the process.
- Section 5 summarises impacts and gives some conclusions and recommendations.
- Appendices including the Story of Change, more complete answers to some questions and list of shows.



photo by *Kate Holmes*



Our approach to the impact assessment

There is a great deal of anecdotal evidence of impact on participants of this experience, arising from them having the space and opportunity to respond to the truth to power question. However there had not previously been any systematic data gathering to assess impact.

Design

As part of the Arts Council England funded support to further develop the show, and the Winter 2019/20 UK tour, Ruth Melville Research were approached to undertake a small piece of consultancy. This was to support London Artists Projects to carry out an independent impact assessment of the effect of taking part in Truth to Power Café on participants, and also to embed a more structured level of reflection in the project team.

Our approach to evaluation and impact assessment was to initially develop a 'Story of Change'² or logic model with the London Artists Projects team to understand who the programme is designed to impact and what the desired outcomes for them would be. This was also shaped by what participants had previously shared about their experiences. As a result of the organic nature of how Truth to Power Café has developed, it is felt particularly useful that there be a single way of summing up the aims and intentions. The Story of Change can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

Analysis

We carried out a univariate analysis of all variables, using the summation calculations set out by the Shorter Warwick-Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale, originally developed in 2007.⁶

We also analysed open questions, using content analysis to draw out learning and the use of keywords to create wordclouds to illustrate participant opinions.

Data gathering

Participants have been asked to reflect on and share their outcomes through one of two survey approaches:

Approach 1

Participants taking part since November 2019, have been asked to complete a 'before' and 'after' online survey (the 'before' survey was sometimes on paper due to event timings).

Within this, they were asked to complete the short version of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS)³ to track their wellbeing change. WEMWBS and SWEMWBS are validated tools⁴ which have been used effectively at national, regional and local levels to measure mental wellbeing in populations aged 16 or over in the UK. Additional before and after questions were asked to enable us to track changes over time.

Approach 2

Participants taking part prior to November 2019 filled in retrospective surveys. These participants were from areas toured by the show in UK, Australia, the Netherlands and Croatia. Feedback was invited from all participants via a direct request from Jeremy Goldstein with a direct link to an online survey (as appropriate to their involvement, either group 1 or 2). A small number of people were given a paper survey at shows (group 1, before survey) where pre-completion had not been possible. Before and after surveys links were sent to 37 people and retrospective survey links to 184 people. 88 full responses were received⁵, including 67 retrospective surveys and 21 before and after surveys (a before plus an after makes one full response).

² For background on Story of Change as a technique see: <https://happymuseumproject.org/story-of-change/>

³ <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs> provides further information. Accessed 26.3.20.

⁴ <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/research/validation>. Accessed 26.3.20.

⁵ 31 people completed 'before' surveys (of which 18 were on paper) and 22 completed 'after' surveys. There were 21 full responses within these ie people who filled in both 'before' and 'after' surveys. There were 67 retrospective surveys. This gives 88 full responses. However, for some questions, the base number is larger as the number of responses to that particular question will have been added to by people doing 'before' responses only.

⁶ <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/about/> Accessed 26.3.20



Story of Change and planned participant outcomes

Truth to Power Café wanted to have a clear story to share with participants, audiences, partners and funders about the difference that they make. This could then be reviewed periodically to ensure the story was being followed (or not). They chose to do this through a Story of Change - a shared, logical plan (or review) of the difference an organisation wants to make and how. This was developed by the truth to power team together with Ruth Melville. The Story of Change is a working document in the sense that it is reviewed regularly to check that it is as it should be. If there are gaps or things that are not happening, then these are amended. This dynamism allows Truth to Power Café to interrogate what they are doing and validates why they are doing it.

There are four sections:

- Why (vision and outcomes)
- What (activity)
- Who (people who matter) and,
- How (commitments, investments and resources).

This report is concerned with the difference made to participants as a result of taking part in Truth to Power Café.

Participant outcomes, shown in the Story of Change in [Appendix 1](#), were to:

- Feel better in selves, experience wellbeing benefits ([Section 2](#))
- Gain voice, enabled to externalise the internal ([Section 3](#))
- Next step in taking power is revealed ([Section 3](#))
- Have meaningful experience ([Sections 3 and 4](#))

The concept of Truth to Power Café is to invite people to answer a central question: Who has power over you and what do you want to say to them? An important outcome for participants is to be able to express this response and to feel it is heard by others. The second outcome is for participants to experience an increase in wellbeing – prior to this report, participants have reported feelings of isolation, powerlessness and unhappiness through their relationships with power. The aim is for them to be able to recognise their personal next steps in taking power, something which may involve changes in their own perceptions of and relationships with power. Finally, an aim is for participants to have a meaningful experience – to feel more deeply that change has occurred.

Who took part in Truth to Power Café?

In order to demonstrate the reach of Truth to Power Café into diverse communities, participants were asked for information on gender, age, ethnicity, disability and highest qualification. The questions on gender, ethnicity and disability were open, with participants asked how they identified within these. Further explanation of the grouping of these answers is given below. Age was initially an open question but changed early on to standard age range options, with previous data fitted to these. We received 88 survey responses to these questions.

Around half of participants were female, about one third were male, and 6% identifying as non-binary, non-conforming or transgender.

Participant ages ranged from those in the 16 – 19 age group to one individual of 85.

Participants answered the question ‘How do you define your ethnicity?’ in different ways.

Further detail is found in [Appendix 3](#) but answers included.

“I am Australian. I have Aboriginal, Irish & Danish ancestors. I look Caucasian.”
– *“Aboriginal and Australian”* – *“Human”*
– *“I don’t”* – *“Brown”* – *“European”* – *“British”, “Lancastrian”* – *“European Bradfordian ”*

These answers do reflect political concepts and attitudes of the times. They also made it difficult to identify which participants were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities (BAME), and this was further complicated as respondents were from different countries. Therefore, we have recorded the percentage who positively self-identified as BAME in the context of each location, and this was 23%.

Just over half of participants did not consider themselves disabled, while 28% did. The majority of participants (61%) were educated up to degree level or higher, while a further 6% were studying for a degree. The next largest group were the 20% who had been to secondary school or college.

Truth to Power Café is therefore accessible to those from a range of diverse communities. These include groups who in the past have often had the lowest level of access to cultural resources and to opportunities to speak truth to those who have power over them.



photo by Sarah Hickson



Section 2 / Impacts on participants’ wellbeing

“I wanted to share the way I try to change my grief of my lost son. I think sharing is a part of healing.”

Quantified wellbeing outcomes

For the 20 participants where the SWEMWBS tool was used, results indicate that they experienced a meaningful positive change in wellbeing through taking part in Truth to Power Café. Participants’ scores increased in all 7 SWEMWBS question areas between signing up to take part, and just after the show (see figure 1 below).

The twenty participants in general had a lower than average sense of wellbeing before the show - their average score for all wellbeing measures were 22 before the show, below the national average of 25.2⁷ - but it rose to 25 when measured afterwards.

Although as noted above, we can’t draw strong conclusions from such a small sample, there are indications that involvement is producing a meaningful change. One study from 2018 has indicated that scores of 7 to 17 for SWEMWBS are likely to represent depression or anxiety. In addition, the same study indicates that changes of average SWEMWBS score of more than 1 or 3 may indicate that a change is more than ‘minimally significant’. Therefore, scores of over three may potentially indicate a more significant change in wellbeing for the individual participant or for groups, but further research is ideally required.

Accordingly with a dataset of limited numbers, we would prefer to see more research on this before reaching firmer conclusions.

We find that:

- Participants experienced positive change in wellbeing from taking part.
- Wellbeing outcomes were positive for all the outcomes measured.
- Those with the lowest sense of wellbeing benefitted from the greatest positive changes.
- Participants felt empowered through the experience of talking part.

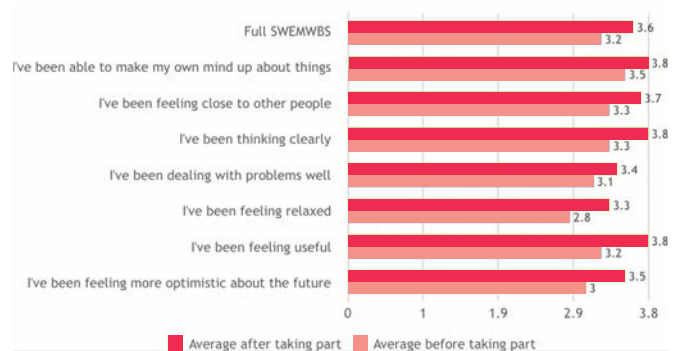


figure 1 / Average participant scores for SWEMWBS wellbeing of the 66 who replied

For those participants with the lowest sense of wellbeing in the group, it would appear that taking part in Truth to Power Café productions can make a large impact on their personal wellbeing measures. Four participants in particular, who had the four lowest wellbeing scores of the group before taking part (all below 20), had increased their scores by large amounts after the show (see figure 2).

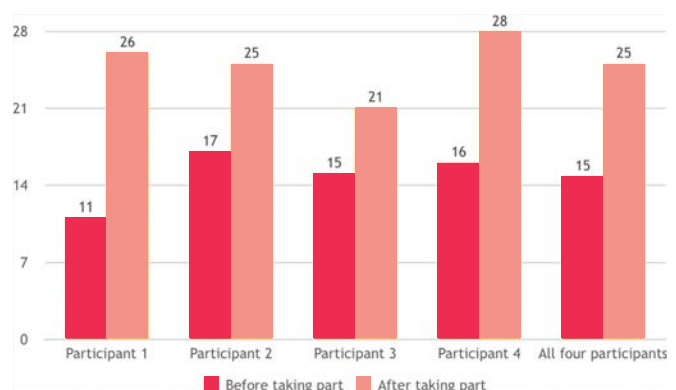


figure 2 / Changes in wellbeing score - participants with lowest self-esteem

One person in particular started at well below the average wellbeing score at 16 but ended up three points above the average at 28. When asked what they got from being involved in Truth to Power Café, this respondent answered: *I got my self-worth and confidence back.*

⁷ National wellbeing measure released October 2019, Office of National Statistics <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/measuringnationalwellbeingdomainsandmeasures> (most recently calculated in 2015-16)



“It erased a black cloud that was hovering over me.”

From wider qualitative responses, we can see that all participants, not just those who responded to SWEMWBS questions, experienced positive wellbeing benefits. When asked ‘Overall, how did taking part in Truth to Power Café affect your wellbeing?’ responses indicated an average score of 89 (where 0 is ‘a very negative impact’, 50 is ‘no impact at all’ and 100 is ‘a very positive impact’).

When asked to explain what it was about Truth to Power Café participation that had made the differences to them, participant responses gave the experience of sharing as the most frequent answer (35% of responses referred to it in some way). 19% of answers referred to the reception given to them by others, and 18% to having a voice and being heard.

All participants in Truth to Power Café were asked to share three words (see figure 3) about how the experience made them feel. The two largest responses were empowered and powerful – together these were 17% of all words chosen. People also felt heard (3% of words), free (4% of words), strong (3% of words), connected (3% of words) and proud (3% of words). Themes of the surrounding words support these themes.



figure 3 / Three words to describe how Truth to Power Café made participants feel

“I felt free from something that had been controlling me for a long time. One evening did what therapy would have taken years to achieve.”

In participant responses, there was primarily a sense that the experience had given them self-confidence and empowerment, supporting the ‘three word’ responses above. This experience was moving and often very emotional. There was a sense of feeling connected with others and overcoming the feeling of isolation – again, hugely freeing for some.

“I felt like someone can understand me. It was not easy to share the story but it really was powerful. The contribution of the other speakers!”

There was often sometimes a sense of being able to let go and move on, and of taking a step towards healing

“Letting out years of pain, was at the [time] most needed.”

The self-challenge and courage involved of sharing their stories onstage was part of what gave them confidence.

Others felt less certain of the longer-term benefits of taking part (21% of the answers detailing changes in wellbeing experienced), or felt they could not yet tell if there was an effect, but there was acknowledgement of what it had meant to others

“It would take more than a stage experience to create lasting effect, however, for many people the opportunity to speak publicly about such power dynamics was clearly a positive thing...”

“It’s too difficult to say as part of an overall life long journey but defo more adventurous around risk taking.”



Artists, and also campaigners, who were often interested in the way the show linked to their own practice found that they had gained useful and positive experience through taking part. 26% of responses to a question about what changes had been made in terms of wellbeing indicated that the participant had been able to make creative gains in terms of new inspiration, development and sometimes opportunity.

“I was interested in the format. The mixture of prose, poetry, visuals from Jeremy and then us 8 [participants] with personal stories. I’m still thinking about it, which is good. I had the satisfaction of campaigning without having to organise the event!”

“It has led to me pitching a book to my publisher and getting a publishing deal to write a book about my health journey.”

Participants in the programme have shown that they felt closer to other people, meaning potentially feeling less lonely for some, and that their mental health and wellbeing improved. Comments also mentioned feeling more connected to others, indicating that they found social ties were built and strengthened.



photo by *Kate Holmes*



Section 3 / Impacts on participants' relationship with power

“Power is like the sea... we all have times when it's too cold or invitingly warm, yet we never truly understand it until we respect its force...”

When asked ‘Overall, how did taking part in Truth to Power Café affect your sense of power?’ the 77 responses indicated an average score of 86 (where 0 is ‘a very negative impact’, 50 is ‘no impact at all’ and 100 is ‘a very positive impact’). This indicates that participants experienced a positive impact on the sense of power. Further responses to other questions detail this. When asked ‘What difference has taking part made to how you view power?’, 64% of the 80 responses indicated that a change of some sort had taken place, whether in perception shift or action. When asked how much it affected them, one said:

“Massively, I am in control of my own power and no-one else.”

However, 16% of the responses to this question indicate that little or no change had taken place (the remaining responses did not indicate either way). However, rather than showing that there was no impact on the participants, answers appear to indicate that the impact was affirmation rather than change.

“I'm not sure there were major differences since I already have a very critical take on power due to previous activism etc.”

We find that:

- Participants felt empowered through the experience of talking part.
- Participants gained a deeper understanding of the nature of power.
- They often experienced changes in their perception of and relationship with power.
- Some participants took steps to change circumstances in their lives, or changed the strategies they used when dealing with power.
- Some of the actions taken by participants involved going on to empower and to help others.

Gaining a voice

“I DON'T DO PUBLIC SPEAKING YET HERE I AM AT THE TRUTH TO POWER CAFÉ...”

Participants reported feeling more ‘vocal’ and that they felt ‘heard without repercussion’. For some, this gaining of a voice was deeply meaningful.

“The realisation of being able to do something I had never done before - speaking up for myself - in a way I have never done so before”

For others, while the experience of gaining this voice had a personal impact on confidence, it was also linked to the process of speaking to an audience itself.

“I got some confidence. I remembered that I was physically able to speak in front of people, and that it isn't painful and it's actually quite enjoyable.”



Enabled to externalise the internal

There was a recognition that Truth to Power Café events involved opening up to others, allowing themselves to feel vulnerable, and sharing stories and thoughts that for were generally kept shut inside, and away from others.

“The experience made me more confident and comfortable to open [up] about my visual impairment.”

There was recognition that people were able to externalise these feelings, but also an appreciation of others doing the same.

“Listening to all the other speeches revived my hope that the human spirit can prevail, that it is worth speaking out ...the support gained from the shared and supportive forum was and is invaluable and necessary to enable the building of a better society.”

Significant changes with the relationship with power

Participation allowed people to reflect deeply on the nature of power, how it had affected them, and what they wanted to say to those with power over them.

“It made me consider power and really reflect on it in a way I haven’t done before. It made me look at how power is such a subjective area, and the power we all actually hold as individuals.”

They often reported feeling a more detailed understanding of power, and the silencing effect it can have.

“I am more conscious of power - both as a threat and an opportunity.”

“I’m quite politically aware and have always been aware of power structures, but it’s made me more aware of how invasive small drip-down power structures work.”

Sometimes it validated their understanding of the power relationships in their own situations – itself an empowerment.

“It helped me focus on the fact that I am not imagining it - it’s real, cold, hard and very, very real.”

Another prominent theme in responses was experiencing change in perception of power, including where it came from, as well as people realising the power in themselves.

“I guess it made me realise that not all power over me is institutional or structural or social, and that family fears, love and respect can be just as powerful holds.”

There was also awareness of negative characteristics of the power held over others, rather than the personal power which people were discovering.

“It affirmed my belief that generally, power is corrupting unless it is handled with full participation of all those affected by it and that it has to really earn respect.”



Next step in taking power is revealed

When asked 'What difference has it made to the action you take against people with power over you?' 58% of 77 responses gave an indication that something had changed in the way they dealt with this. 5% of answers specified that little or nothing had changed.

“Their power was diminished. I became more confident and able to challenge perceived injustice.”

“Not sure it has made a significant difference.”

Some participants reported that they felt inspired to take next steps in accordance with their new feelings around power. While not all of these were felt strongly, some led to decisive steps.

“I resigned from my job for political reasons and entered a new phase of my career, inspired by my participation. (I don't believe I've actually told Jeremy or Jen this!)”

Often, this would come in the form of having more self-confidence and feeling more empowered in themselves, and then going on to help empower others.

“I have since become an ambassador for the mental health programme at my college which allows people to have the chance to talk and open up.”

For some people, next steps in both personal and artistic development were combined, and also worked as one to produce a new action that would support others. Sometimes, participants stayed in touch to achieve this together.

Many began to develop new strategies dealing with power in different ways. Sometimes that involving being able to block that power, while others reported finding a newly controlled and confident approach to power, and changing their own role and response to it. For one participant, this involved gaining the capacity to find compassion for the people with the power for some participants, and a way of feeling resolution.

“It changed the way I speak from a position of rage to a sense of pity, that they feel so desperate for power over others. Whilst still feeling the need to challenge injustice and acknowledging they still have some form of power over me, I realise that I can find a sense of freedom, and that in their need for power over me, they do not have freedom. It connected me to their humanity, even as they fail to acknowledge mine.”

In other situations, the people or situations who had held power for participants had now passed away or were absent (for better or worse) in other ways. These participants often still felt the production helped them with perception of the power and the relationship with the power itself.

“I'm just moving on with my life. I'm beyond surviving. I'm thriving.”



“Truth to Power Cafe is a great concept and context for us all to think about power and responsibility, and to give a public voice to people who are not always heard to say things to those who hold power over them. I spoke of the power men in suits have over us and their policy of austerity which brought misery to millions. Ban the suit, not the burqa.”

**Lois Keidan, Founder and Director
Live Art Development Agency
Truth to Power Cafe participant 2016**



Section 4 / Participants had meaningful experiences

“I have long term mental health issues [and] this experience has threaded its way along more than a year... The sense of the whole company, the belief they had in me, they let me be part of the programme, alone on stage and in the group on stage. It really was a wonderful experience.”

Why did people sign up?

People were often inspired to sign up having seen the show before or through word-of mouth from friends. Sometimes they or the organisation they work for had been invited to take part, and sometimes they had approached the team and had asked to take part. The focuses of the testimonials were diverse and often intensely important in terms of personal power and/or relate to wider issues power in society and politics. Examples include racism, fear, grief, family members, childhood relationships, activism e.g. extinction rebellion, the Grenfell Tower tragedy, animal captivity, climate change, poverty, mental health and transgender issues.

The most frequent words used in the 92 answers to the question ‘Why did you decide to take part?’ were opportunity, with share and speak nearly as prominent, and closely followed by story.

Themes of other answers often allied to these themes, and also included interest in the process and the concept of the show, challenge, truth, liberation and recovery. Being invited and encouraged to take part was also a theme. People mentioned topics such as grief, mental health, knife crime, education and change.

We find that:

- Participants greatly valued the opportunity to share their stories.
- Participants hoped to gain confidence through taking part in Truth to Power Café.
- They got most of what they hoped for from the experience.
- Participants felt strongly supported and welcomed by the Truth to Power Café team.
- The team value and care about participants.
- Jeremy’s input into the show was valued by participants.
- They generally felt well prepared for giving their testimony onstage, and valued the team and the rehearsal process in this.
- Some participants had some questions around the amount of preparation time needed, and a few felt they needed further information about what taking part would be like.
- There may be a need to manage the length of testimonies given.
- Some participants did not ‘gel’ with aspects of the show format and the balance between artist and participant input.
- Participants would welcome a way of ‘following up’ their experience, by reflection time after the event and time to speak more to other participants, and potentially by follow up conversations or workshop sessions in the future.

“In a world with increases in knife crime to young people particularly black males it was important to raise awareness of the impacts as a mother.”

Longer comments about taking part included supported these main themes also. Others mentioned wanting to connect with the audience, perhaps because their stories might resonate with them, and to find connection with like-minded people.

“I wanted to tell my story because I have suffered for years in silence.”



Self-challenge, or sharing their inner stories as well as the act of public speaking itself, were other reasons. A large group of responses had to do with artists and campaigners, who wanted the opportunity to test and experience the show and to develop their own practice – an opportunity to develop their own skills and/or create their own art. This was often in addition to personal reasons for doing the show, which could be linked to the art and often the campaigning. Activists valued the opportunity to speak about and share the issues that motivated them.

“I was contacted by Jeremy about helping to promote the show and was really interested in the process and how the show was put together. I am also a writer I thought it was a brilliant creative challenge so asked if I could also take part.”

Some, including those who did not consider themselves artists or activists, took the opportunity to express and create encouraged by the mixed format of the show. Speaking in public was often entirely new and challenging, while others appeared to use it to hone their existing skills and try new formats of connecting with an audience.

Several people also mentioned supporting a young person or wishing to demonstrate that speaking truth to power was valuable – as a role model to their own children.

What did participants hope to get from taking part?

The answers to this question reinforce that for many, this experience was very much about a deeply meaningful and important personal journey involving taking back power. The single largest answer was confidence, followed by share, performance, story and personal. Experience and perform were close behind. Again, associated answers support the conclusion that people who participated in the show did so to help them share and deal with something that affected them intensely.

“A way to let go of things I was holding onto. Potentially shredding the script or somehow physically letting them go.”

“I had lost all confidence and self-esteem after long episodes of depression. It was a huge challenge to rise above the fear and make a public performance.”

Many answers referred to connecting with others and appreciating the testimony of others. Others anticipated it as a much lighter occasion, expecting...

“Just fun actually and some experience.”

Some valued the performance process, often linked to their own artistic or campaigning role, and also felt it would be about connection and sometimes networking. Part of this was to develop their own creativity.

“I wanted to push myself to perform some of my own writing live. Since graduating in performance, I haven't really performed but worked within the arts within a more management role. I have always written, and I am interested in doing more creative writing and sharing it at spoken word evenings, and possibly creating a performance. I thought that by writing specifically about 'power' I would be challenged to write about something different and push myself out of my own comfort zone by speaking in front of a live audience.”



Did participants get what they hoped to from taking part?

People reported got a majority of what they hoped for, a strong positive, and often indicated that they got more than they expected.

“I did not think it would be as empowering and freeing as it was”

They scored ‘getting what they hoped for’ as 89 (0 is ‘not at all’ and 100 is ‘completely’). 65% of the 87 responses were between 90 and 100. At the other, end of the scale there were only three responses under 50.

Preparation and support before the show

When asked what worked particularly well about Truth to Power Café, 39% of the 55 responses referred positively to aspects of the process itself, including 13% who specifically mentioned how supportive it was. A further 11% to Jeremy’s input and 21% to the way the team worked with the participants. 16% referred to the participant group or to the collective/community aspect of their experience.

“I felt totally welcomed and nurtured by Jeremy, Jen and Sarah, through the whole experience, and like we were part of a community.”

Although a couple of people said they would have preferred a bit more information on what exactly it would be like on the night, preparation and contact before the day of the show was praised by nearly everyone:

“The application process was good, with the question on the website, and time to think through what to say, then a follow up phone call from Jeremy. The whole process was very supportive, and expectations were really clear.”

This helped them manage their involvement in the show, especially as the subject matter was often intensely meaningful and important – sharing it involved vulnerability, which to many was a great step.

Rehearsals and time before the show were commended, and 4% said it was something that specifically worked well about Truth to Power Café, separately from the other process comments. They referred to

“The respectful way [I was] supported in preparing / practising speeches and the affirmation throughout.”

“The meeting and trial run of speakers was essential to create courage and empowerment to speak. The choreography of the ‘show’ made the bitter pills go down with a bit of humour.”



A very few responses indicated a wish for a little more rehearsal time or acknowledged that the show involves a balance between preparing the participants and the spontaneous aspects and authenticity of the testimonies themselves.

“There was just enough development time to be effective while still feeling the excitement of it being quite raw.”

Several participants praised the photographer’s ability to put them at ease:

“Sarah’s portraits were taken in the most supportive, relaxed, friendly way...such a positive experience... she seemed to capture each one of us with such truth and honesty.”

Generally, participants felt they were given enough information and knew how things would work.

“I think the whole process worked very well. I had everything that was needed explained to me clearly before the event. I knew what I was doing and when.”

There was clearly good quality support for participants and their welfare.

“Jeremy and Jen both made me feel comfortable. Jeremy was checking up on me, before every event started and after. I felt so important and valuable.”

Whether or not participants who may be vulnerable are at a stage of being ready to share their stories is taken very seriously by the team, as part of a sense of having a duty of care, as is their safety.

“There was one speaker from previous shows, who wanted my email to send emails. Jeremy was lovely and advised [me] to not trust [him] as he doesn’t know him. And [to] keep myself safe.”

Occasional comments showed that more information about these support processes would be useful.

“You were all lovely but I was concerned that more vulnerable people might have felt a bit unsure about how they fitted in with the “show” part.”

This commenter would have been unaware of any private discussions and preparation with other participants, and would not have known about how any support for them before the day of the show had happened. Providing information about support for participants more formally and more explicitly (perhaps on the website, which already encourages first-time participants warmly¹⁴) might provide more certainty for participants but also reassure other participants and audiences that the support systems are there.

¹⁴ <https://www.truthtopower.co.uk/invitation-to-take-part>
[accessed 23.3.20]



The experience of the show

“If it’s not broke, don’t fix it!”

64% of 71 responses said ‘nothing’ worked ‘less well’ about Truth to Power Café and when asked what would make it more effective for them, 37% of 50 responses said either ‘nothing’ or ‘not sure’.

When asked to explain what it was about Truth to Power Café that had made the differences to them, the most frequent of the 52 responses (as shown in section 2) were about sharing with others and the reception given to them by others, and to having a voice and being heard. This was the main thing that worked for them. A further 30% referred to the group and the participants and their input, showing that the other participants and the feeling of involvement with this mini-community was very important. Participants value the community, and there was a persistent thread of answers indicating that people would like to find ways of developing and maintaining it.

4% indicated that it was actually interaction with the group offstage that made the difference to them. In fact, when asked what worked less well about Truth to Power Café, 3% of responses referred to a wish to be able to spend longer connecting with the others. When asked what would make Truth to Power Café more effective for them, 4% of participant responses said the same, and 5% said that a way of continuing the connection would be good. Suggestions also included having a follow up event (5% for this alone), or having a reunion. A workshop approach to preparing participants was also suggested.

Other suggestions for making the show even more effective included making more use of IT platforms (11%)

“I have a strong sense of respect and trust the creative people behind this, [and they] will find a way to nurture it into something outstanding.”

The format of the show itself was praised and the way a potentially challenging experience was made to feel safe. This was very often seen as down to the influence of the artist in the format of the show.

“Jeremy’s sharing in the first half made it feel like a safe place to come on stage and share with people you didn’t know. Both Jen & Jeremy made it feel comfortable.”

In the same way as rehearsal time, some people indicated that a longer time to speak would be an improvement, while others valued the...

“Limited time for people to speak.”

Others felt that people were sometimes allowed to talk for too long, and that adjustment of this might have a positive effect.

“I think it is very important to be aware of how long the speech goes on for...it’s better to really slim down what you want to say and keep it interesting.”

There were several comments around this, and it may suggest that a mechanism to help make sure participants adhere more to the time limits without curtailing the flow of their speeches could be useful. Participants reacted warmly to Jeremy himself, and in general the response to his input into and performance in the show was also very positive.

“I loved how the participants were onstage after speaking and took part in the final section, it built that sense of community with Jeremy and what he spoke about throughout the show too.”



However, some comments suggested that an alteration in the balance between Jeremy's input and the participants' stories may be helpful. 3% of answers to 'What worked less well' referred to this balance, of input or sometimes power, some saying his input was too long.

“Jeremy's story is incredibly emotional. I do think that there were aspects of his performance that could have been cut down a bit. Perhaps his reading of the letter?”

One said that they felt they had gained through the process of considering power, but did not relate that to the content of the show itself.

“I learned from myself and my writings about power, but not really from the Café. It just made me a little bit uncomfortable with the angel show from Jeremy.”

Another felt that it had been

“A very weird experience actually, but it was fun.”

These should, of course, be seen in the context that the reception of art productions can be a matter of taste, while responses to them are formed through a lens of the personal context of the respondent. Despite not being the desired outcome, as ever comments such as these help inform the perspective that artistic teams have on their work, and as such may be very useful as the Truth to Power Café team seek to develop and refine the experience in the future

New perspectives

On a personal level people frequently felt they had had gained deeper understanding or new or altered perspectives. Artists and campaigners also reported gaining meaningful experience related to their roles as well as on a personal level. Sometimes this was about the experience and format of the performance process, as well as the inspiring content, and in turn fed a new energy into their own practice. Sometimes it helped reaffirm their self-belief as an artist:

“It was a significant point in my career as a poet, and it helped to strengthen my confidence and resolve.”

Truth to Power Café productions therefore have a route to inspiring and encouraging other campaigners, who will continue their own effect on other people and on communities and society.



Following up and maintaining connection

Another theme running through responses was a wish to reflect on their performances and to speak more to other participants. Mention was made of the surveys as a valued way of doing this, but people would like a way of speaking to each other, reflecting, and being able to feed back more.

“That we didn’t get that much time together as a group of participants, time to socialise / reflect on our own words and stories would have been nice.”

Others suggested follow up workshops around the themes of power, follow up sessions to see how others had developed following their involvement, or simply opportunities to stay in touch with others more easily.

“Some of us have kept in touch since the event, and are planning some community work together. I would love to take part again and would totally recommend the experience.”

Certainly other artists and campaigners valued the experience of linking their own practice and development to the Truth to Power Café experience, and there would be potential there for developing this further.



LONDON ARTISTS PROJECTS

TRUTH TO
POWER





Section 5 / Conclusions and recommendations

Truth to Power Café have been successful in building trust with individuals taking part in order to allow them to feel comfortable sharing their stories. People who get in touch often include people from minority groups who feel that the events are inclusive, as well as other artists and activists who wish to connect. The need to build resilience and positivity in people is built into the process, with support, as is the option and the encouragement to develop personal creativity.

Its aim of enabling positive changes in wellbeing for participants has clearly been achieved, and it has often allowed people to develop better mental health and wellbeing. Some participants have built social ties between them, and many report feeling more connected to others. Those who take part have been able to reflect on and often alter their relationships with power for the better. The events are reaching disabled people and people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. The team and the process of producing the show is valued by participants. Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive, although it also provided opportunities to potentially make constructive alterations as the Truth to Power Café team seeks to improve the quality of the programme even further and develop it in the future. There is a great deal of support and buy-in to the process, and the Truth to Power Café experience has been loved and appreciated for the self-esteem and the self-realisation it has enabled participants to experience.

Recommendations

We recommend that:

- Truth to Power Café should continue to collect data around impact on participant outcomes using existing methods
- Additional research should be considered – and resources sought to enable this to happen – for example, a social return on investment calculation to show a value of the changes made to participants, or by following some participants in future case studies.
- Participant feedback from this report, and ongoing surveys, should be used to make adjustments to the show's process to ensure it meets participants' needs even more.
- The team consider whether there are opportunities to use participant experience and the 'Truth to Power Café alumni group' to develop new elements or iterations of the show, for example through developing new collaborations.
- Truth to Power Café considers developing a mechanism for participants to reflect on their experiences together following the show. Suggestions include a follow up session in the days soon after their testimony (perhaps including online contact for those who could not appear in person), a method of staying in touch online, or even a follow-up event at the end of a tour.



photo by *Ruth Clarke*

About Ruth Melville Research

Ruth Melville Research is a freelance consultancy which specialises in evaluation and research development.

Director Dr. Ruth Melville is a freelance researcher and evaluation consultant with over 20 years' experience of research design and analysis within the cultural, regeneration, environment and social inclusion sectors. She has a strong commitment to ensuring evaluation systems fit the user, and has advised both Arts Council England and Department for Culture Media and Sport committees looking at new models of measurement and impact that work for organisations at all levels. She is currently Critical Friend to several Creative People and Places programmes and is working with a range of arts and cultural organisations on embedding evaluation into their practice at both a strategic and practical level.

Research Coordinator Catherine Doran is experienced in the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. Following a teaching career, she completed an MA in Museum Studies and has worked on evaluations for Firstsite Contemporary Art Centre, Stopgap Dance Company, LeftCoast Creative People and Places Programme and Arts Council England's Change Creation resilience programme amongst others.



Appendices

Appendix 1: Story of Change





Appendix 2: Questionnaires

Question asked	'Before' survey	'After' survey	'Retrospective' survey
What is your name?	X		X
What show (date/location) are you participating in?	X		X
Why have you decided to take part in Truth to Power Café?	X		X
What do you hope to get from taking part? Please let us know any ideas you have, however vague.	X		X
Have you seen the show before?	X	X	
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	X	X	
I've been feeling useful	X	X	
I've been feeling relaxed	X	X	
I've been dealing with problems well	X	X	
I've been thinking clearly	X	X	
I've been feeling close to other people	X	X	
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	X	X	
I can express how I feel about my life	X	X	
So far, what do you think has worked well about TTPC?	X		
So far, what do you think could be improved?	X		
How do you define your gender?	X		X
What age are you?	X		X
Do you consider yourself to be disabled?	X		X
Highest qualification	X		X
Postcode	X		X
How would you define your ethnicity?	X		x
What was the subject of your speech to power?		X	X
Did you get what you had hoped for from taking part in Truth to Power Café?		X	X



Appendix 2: Questionnaires

Question asked	'Before' survey	'After' survey	'Retrospective' survey
Please let us know what you did get from taking part in the show. How did this differ from what you expected?		X	X
What three words would you use to describe how the experience made you feel?		X	X
What difference did your involvement in the Truth to Power Café make to how you view power?		X	X
What difference did your involvement in the Truth to Power Café make to how you speak to those who have power over you?		X	X
What difference did your involvement in the Truth to Power Café make to how you take action against those who have power over you?		X	X
Overall, how did taking part in Truth to Power Café affect your wellbeing?		X	X
Overall, how did taking part in Truth to Power Café affect your sense of power?		X	X
What was it about being involved in Truth to Power Café that made these differences?		X	X
How could this be made even more effective for you?		X	X
Please can you tell us more about what kind of changes in wellbeing you have noticed and why you gave the scores you did to questions 14 to 21 [SWEMWBS]		x	
What do you think worked well about the Truth to Power Café process?		X	X
Did anything not work so well about the Truth to Power Café process?		X	X
Was there anything about Truth to Power Café that particularly worked, or particularly didn't work?		X	X
Do you have anything else you would like to tell us about?		X	X
Please tell us about any changes you have noticed in terms of how you feel about yourself. For example, have you felt more or less optimistic, more ore less relaxed? Do you feel differently about your life? Has your confidence changed? Or the way you deal with issues, or other people? Please write as much as you can – we really value your answers.			X



Appendix 3: Full demographic answers

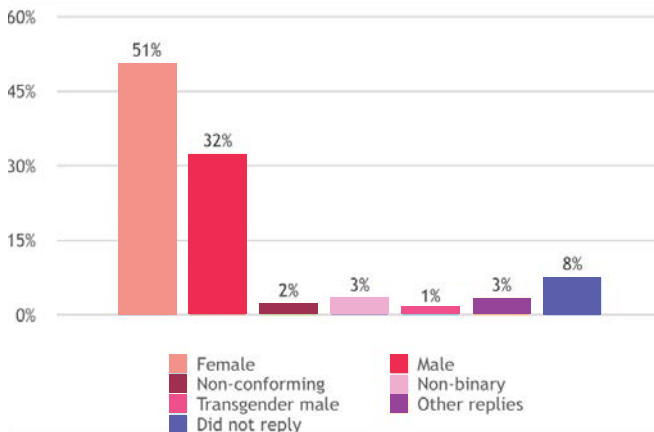


figure 4 / Participant self-identified gender, base 86 answers

(NB Female answers included Female Queer Bisexual, Male answers included: Cis gendered male.
Non-conforming answers included: non-conforming, gender non conforming/gender fluid).
Other replies included: straight, sexual, women.

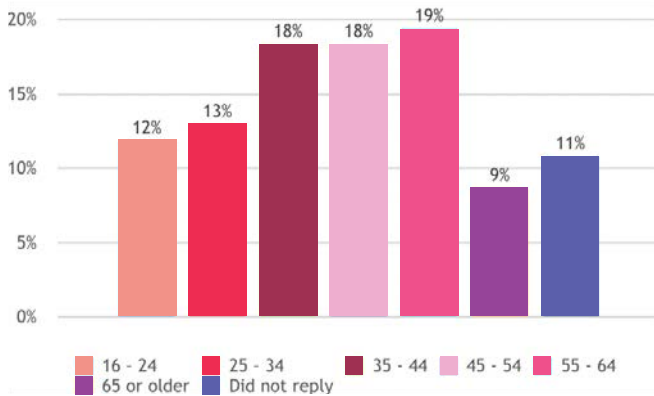


figure 5 / Participant age, base 57 answers

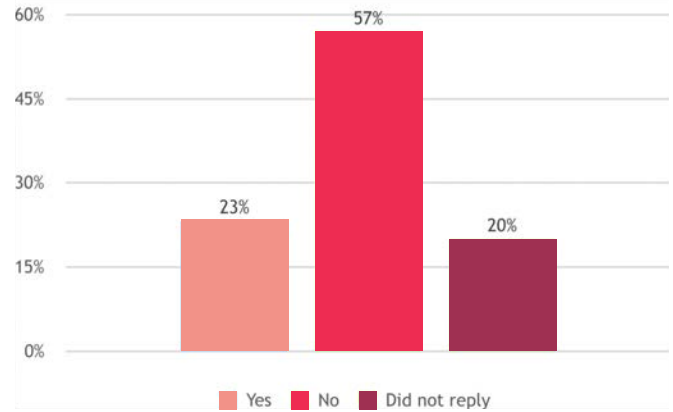


figure 6 / Percentage of participants self-identifying as BAME, base 95 answers

BAME answers included: Black British, Pakistani, Mixed race, South Asian, British Asian, Aboriginal and Australian, Cypriot, MIXED, Black, Chinese, White mixed. Did not reply answers included those where the reply field was left blank and those where it was unclear whether the respondent self-identified as BAME or not, including: European, European Bradfordian, global, human, I don't, caucasian, white, wh, working class.

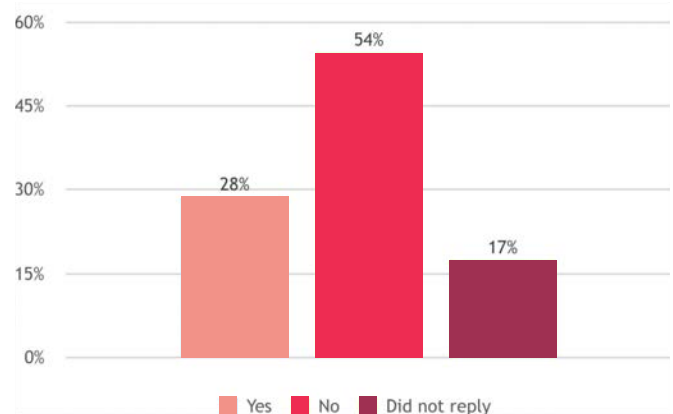


figure 7 / Participant self-identified disability, base 68 answers

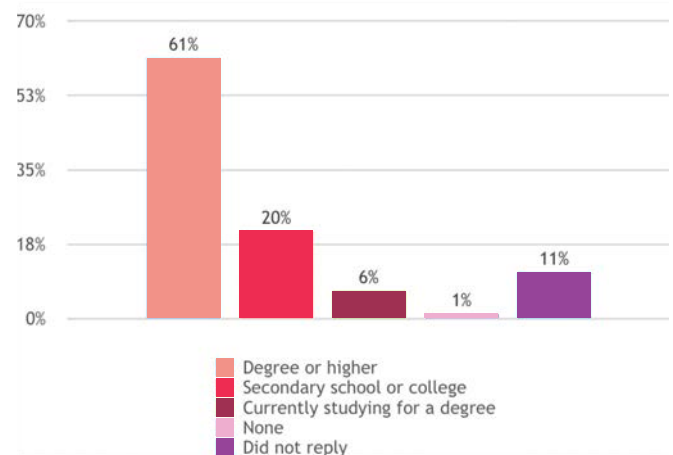


figure 8 / Participants' highest qualification, base 85 answers



Appendix 4: A list of all previous Truth to Power Café performances

2020

6th February, Cast Doncaster, UK
23rd January, Norwich Arts Centre, UK

2016

21st-24th September, Soho Theatre London, UK

2019

16th November, Unity Theatre Liverpool, UK
15th November, The Arts Centre at Edge Hill University, UK
20th October, Bloomsbury Festival at Conway Hall London, UK
12th October, Touchstones Rochdale, UK
3rd October, Square Chapel, Halifax, UK
25th September, Cambridge Junction, UK
19th September, Pinter Legacies Conference, Workshop Theatre, Leeds, UK
4th July, Barnsley Civic, UK
30th June, Trades Club, Hebden Bridge Arts Festival, UK
24th May-1st June, Back to Ours, Hull
26th-27th April, Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, UK
28th February, Gulbenkian Arts Centre, Kent, UK

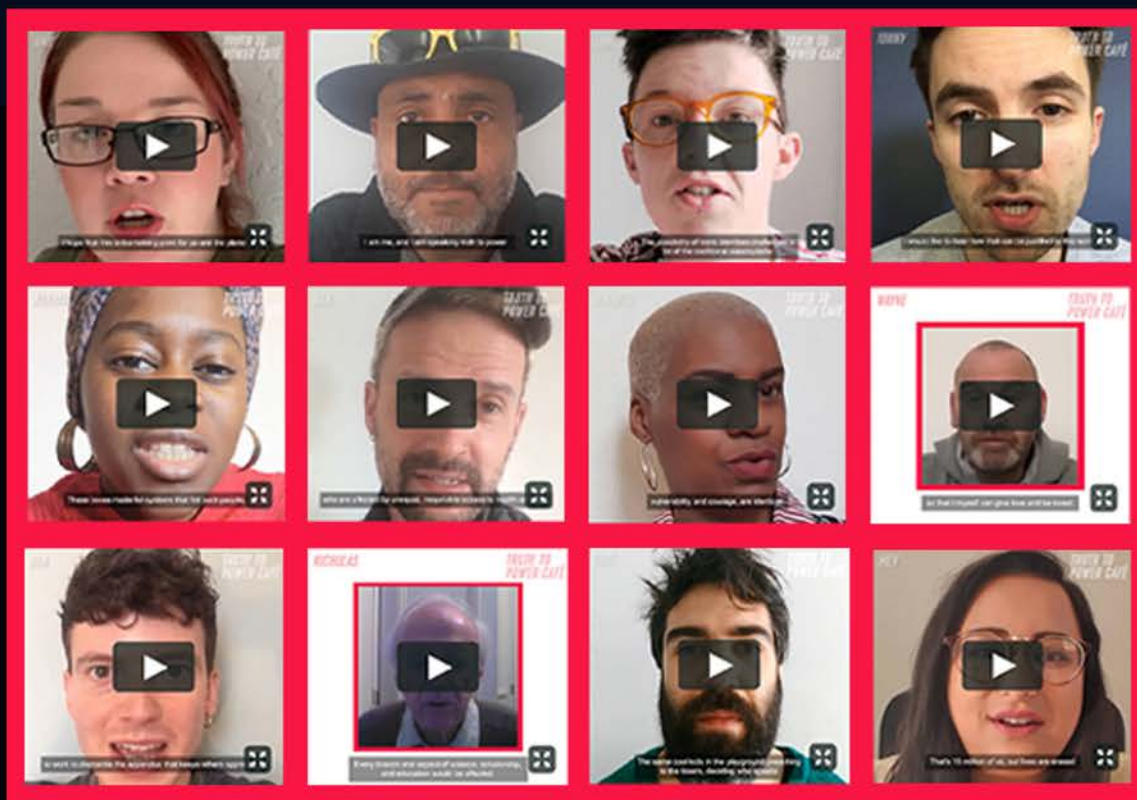
2018

15th November, Centraal Station, Iepen UP, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands
10th November, V&A Dundee, National Theatre of Scotland, UK
15th October, The Arts Centre at Edge Hill University, UK
19th-22nd July, Welcome to the Village, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands
23rd May, Neushoorn Cafe, Iepen UP, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands
15th May, Queer Zagreb, Croatia
14th April, Mudgeeraba Gold Coast, Bleach Festival, Australia
9th-11th April, Avenue, Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games, Australia
9th February, Theatre in the Mill, Bradford, UK
8th February, Cast Doncaster, UK

2017

8th November, Theatre in the Mill, Bradford, UK
(scratch – not included in this study)

COVID-19



"TRUTH TO POWER CAFE TELLS IT LIKE IT IS. IT'S ENTERTAINING, ENGROSSING AND INFORMATIVE. TAKE PART. I DID. OR JUST TURN UP FOR INSPIRATION AND EMPOWERMENT."

**PETER TATCHELL, INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST,
TRUTH TO POWER CAFE PARTICIPANT 2016 AND 2020**



photo by Jerome Whittingham

photos by Sarah Hickson



London Artists Projects commissioned Ruth Melville Research to write this independent Impact Study with funding from Arts Council England Report Design by Rui Verde



Ruth Melville Research



Supported using public funding by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND