

## **SOUTH AFRICAN REPORT TO AFRICAN REGIONAL NETWORKING MEETING OF ASSITEJ**

### **Immediate History:**

Niclas Malmcrona and Andries Oliphant identified the fact that South Africa had made little progress in initiating or sustaining a chapter of Assitej. Andries then approached Janet Watts (JW) of Creative Voices to work on this, but due to her unavailability for the conference, Yvette Hardie (YH, who is also associated with Creative Voices) was asked to attend in her place. JW will still be involved in the future, as we make Assitej a reality in SA.

### **Present context:**

Despite the fact that South Africa has been present at various meetings and conferences over the years of Sida's initiative in facilitating the Assitej Africa Network, it seems that nothing has taken hold or been sustained over time. At this stage, it seems that no formal structures exist for Assitej in South Africa (YH will be ascertaining whether this is in fact the case). There was an attempt to create a centre based in Durban, but this seems to be no longer active. There seems to have been a problem of capacity of individuals who have attended in the past to create national, rather than regional, networks. There also has been a lack of continuity. YH and JW have undertaken to ensure that this situation does not continue into the future.

South Africa is rich in many and varied artistic activities with a children and youth focus, but these activities are not coordinated into any kind of national network focusing on children and youth theatre. Also there has been little exposure of South African work to the rest of the continent or beyond, and there has certainly been very little interaction between South Africa and the rest of Africa on any extensive or ongoing basis.

### **Possible project partners, which have been identified:**

Creative Voices – based in Johannesburg at the National School of the Arts, this very effective programme trains teachers over two years to facilitate arts and culture learning experiences in primary schools, through workshops, mentoring programmes and support. Teachers learn to facilitate the creation of original workshopped musical theatre pieces with their learners and these productions are given a platform by Creative Voices.

National School of the Arts – a high school for the performing and visual arts, which has a national profile and runs an annual schools festival, known as Festival of Fame. It has links to the other two art schools, both based in Gauteng – Pro Arte Alphen Park and East Rand School of the Arts.

Focus schools nationally for Arts and Culture – each province has identified focus schools for arts and culture; these include Lady Grey art school in the Free State and Chris Hani High School in Khaylitsha, Cape Town. These schools already have intensive activity for young people in the arts, and can be utilised as starting points for involving the broader school community.

Other schools with an interest in drama, which are reached through the National Schools Festival system, which has various provincial branches, Festival of Fame, Michaelhouse Arts Festival and other school-based festivals. Also the broader Arts festivals, which usually have components aimed at children or youth (National Arts Festival, Cape Town International Arts Festival, Aardklop, Klein Karoo Kunstefees, Makufe festival etc.)

Competitions and showcases for children and youth that are currently in existence: Raps One-Act play festival, Original Works Festival, Reflections Community theatre festival, Zwakala festival, the SANCTA festivals, etc.

Universities, Technicons and Colleges which are dealing with training in the Arts fields and are running programmes for children/youth. Definite inclusions are University of Cape Town, University of Pretoria, University of Witwatersrand, Rhodes University, Tshwane University of Technology, University of Durban-Westville, Fort Hare University. Also other training institutions such as the Actors Centre (at the Civic theatre), which runs outreach projects and youth training sessions, AFDA (film and television school) and others.

Community centres, which are well-established and are running youth-oriented programmes, such as Sibikwa (Gauteng), AMAC (Cape Town), Market theatre Laboratory (Gauteng), New Africa Theatre Project (Cape), Khaya Multi-Arts Centre (KZN), BAT centre (KZN) etc.

Other focus projects, such as Soweto Rhythms, which trains young people in dance, drama and music; the Mothertongue project, which works largely with women and

girls, Themba-HIV Aids project, which works in schools on Aids awareness, Ubom which focuses on youth in the Eastern Cape, Aghulhas Theatre Works which works with physically challenged learners, using dance and drama, From the Hip: Khulumakahle which creates theatre pieces for young people, the Hillbrow theatre, which works with streetkids and school kids in the Hillbrow area.

Already-existing theatre organisations and networks such as PANSA, SATI, TMSA, SANCTA and NACTED.

The Naledi Awards (Gauteng-based theatre award system) is exploring the possibility of an award in the category of children's theatre. YH is on the Naledi Judging panel and thus can push for this to happen.

Already-established theatres, which do children's theatre productions, productions of setworks, outreach to schools etc. Proposed contacts are at Artscape, Baxter theatre, Market theatre, Playhouse, State Theatre, Sand du Plessis, Windybrow, Civic theatre, Youth Theatre, Kwasuka theatre. Possibly, since few of these theatres have fully-fledged children's programmes, directors who are known to work in the field and present their work at these venues, should also be contacted.

Storytelling initiatives such as Zanendaba (Gcina Mhlope) and Sibkiwa's annual Storytelling workshop. Also poetry events with a focus on youth, such as Urban Voices.

Professional theatre organisations which do performances oriented towards children and youth, such as AREPP (educational theatre), Phakama (site-specific theatre), New Africa (educational theatre), "Walking Tall" (which recently toured to a Science fair in Belgium), "Out the Box", Magnet theatre (which has recently toured with "Cargo" to Cameroon) and others, which tour their productions to communities and schools. Many of these performances are HIV-Aids related.

Individual practitioners will also be approached: the original South Africans who attended meetings with Assitej; Nicky du Plessis, Janet Watts (Creative Voices); Mpho Molepo (SATI), Sandile Matsheni (Soweto Rhythms), Phyllis Klotz and Smal Ndaba (Sibikwa), Woutrine Theron (Tshwane University of Technology), Gay Morris, Thoko Ntshinga, Sabata Sesui, Liz Mills, Mark Fleishman (UCT), Lara Foot and Mannie Manim (Baxter), Malcolm Purkey (Market), Mncedisi Shabangu, James

Ndlovu, Jennie Reznik (Magnet theatre), Mike van Graan, Themobile Pepeteka (Pulpit theatre), Warren Nebe and Sara Matchett (Wits), Edmund Mhlongo (K-CAP), Zuko Masela (CT festival), Lorraine Singh (KZN Education), Janet Buckland (Ubom), Jacqueline Dommise (AMAC/Out the Box), Ian Bruce (New Africa Theater PProject), Ina Bruce (Western Cape Education), Janet Baylis (Gauteng Education), Janice Honeyman, Amanda Gifford, Ishmael Mohamed, Moira de Swart, Alex Sutherland, Noel McDonald, Thami Makanya (PANSAs), Gcina Mhlope, Thembi Mtshali, Des and Dawn Lindberg, and others...

**Possible sources of funding:**

Seed funding will be sought in order to set up the network from Department of Arts and Culture, National Arts Council, Arts and Culture Trust, National Lottery Distribution Fund, and others.

**Proposed action:**

1. YH to meet with Andries Oliphant and JW to report back on meeting.
2. YH to follow up on previous delegates to Assitej meetings, and explore legal status of organisation, if any.
3. YH to draft email to send to the above-mentioned organisations/ individuals and put out a general call for interest through PANSAs, SATI, TMSA and the National education department.
4. Assitej SA will initially be based at Creative Voices offices until sufficient involvement from others is assured in order to explore further options.
5. YH and JW to meet with prospective organisations/individuals in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town.
6. YH and JW to gather more information on activities in the children/youth theatre sector and begin to create a database which could become the basis for a website.
7. Report back to Assitej regional members on progress, by end of May.
8. Construct a basic membership plan and recruit members.
9. Work towards a meeting of South African delegates for July 2007 in Grahamstown at the National Arts festival, where most artists gather.
10. With the SA delegates, at this meeting, plot a path forward.