

DOXEY COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

PRESS RELEASE - 5 February 2005

Village Voices

- Staffordshire community initiative wins Arts Council funding
- Local people will learn theatre skills and put on a play about their community
- A national theatre company is involved
- Project to contribute to revitalising of the local community

Doxey is a small community on the edge of Stafford. It is separated from Stafford by half a mile of undeveloped land. Bounded by the main railway line from London to Glasgow, the M6 motorway and the track of a disused railway it is self contained. It has many of the features of a village and is often referred to as such. Only about half of the area of Doxey is developed. The rest is made up of play areas, scrub and farmland.

Since 1996 Doxey has had a community association which seeks to promote the well-being of the people of Doxey in a variety of ways; either supporting actions by other organisations or by organising its own events. In 1998 it began its campaign to secure parish status for the village and last year the Office of the Deputy Primer Minister announced that a parish council of Doxey would come into being in 2005. Election of the councillors will take place in May.

More/

A major activity of Doxey Community Association (DCA) has been its involvement in the Mikron touring theatre group, based in Marsden, West Yorkshire. The company has four actors/musicians, two writers, a musical director and an administrator. During their tours they use a 70 ft. narrow boat as their base. Many of their performances take place in canalside venues, but they do on occasions venture beyond canals to locations where they can play to larger audiences. Each year the company tours with two productions, written by its own writers and musical director. In June 2003 Mikron came to Doxey at the invitation of the Community Association. As well as putting on one of its plays the company did workshops with local people and stayed overnight with local families.

The impact of the visit was such that both Mikron and the Community association were determined that a return visit would be made. This took place in June 2004, when the company put on both of its productions in that year's repertoire. It also put on workshops at the local primary school in Doxey. By now the relationship between Doxey and Mikron was firm and the question was not whether Mikron would return, but on what basis.

In the autumn of 2004 ideas began to grow. It is difficult to say where they had their origin - who contributed to the final plans and how - but by Christmas they had gelled into a proposal that Mikron would write - in their inimitable style - a play based on the village of Doxey, that it would be performed - in the first instance - by Doxey people and that Doxey people would also undertake all of the other tasks involved in putting on a theatre production: music, costumes, lighting, set building, publicity and front of house. We suspected that there was already a base of relevant talents in the village, but we did not intend to count on this. Rather, we sought to give to those who had an interest in the theatre and enthusiasm to learn an opportunity to acquire the necessary skills by working with local professionals in those fields.

More/

This is a highly innovative project which has several objectives.

It seeks to make live theatre more accessible to the people of Doxey.

Over 60 people will have learned and developed skills in one or more of the areas associated with production of a piece of theatre.

The cohesion of the community of Doxey will be greatly enhanced.

The Mikron theatre will acquire material for one of its 2005 productions.

At an early stage it was realised that there would be a substantial financial cost to this project as well as an enormous input of local effort. Mikron is a professional company and their time would have to be paid for, as would be the local professionals who would be providing training for Doxey people. There would also be costs of publicity, materials, hire of premises, etc. The total came to £36 000. The DCA committee started writing to a variety of grant makers. A bid was made in early 2004 to the Arts Council. It was awful timing that the rejection of this bid came the day after Mikron's second performance. However, we were invited to bid again and this time it was successful with an award of £27 510. This was made on condition of funding being obtained from other sources. Subsequently a grant of £1500 has been made by Staffordshire Council and the William Sutton Housing Association which has an estate in Doxey and has supported DCA from its inception has made a donation, too. Some bids for further funds are in the pipeline and it is expected that some donations from the local community will make up the total.

Throughout the development process the Community Association has valued the support of Stafford Borough's arts officers and of Culturegen, the Borough's organisation which promotes the work of arts professionals in and around Stafford. This collaboration will continue until the end of the project.

More/

Work on the project is well under way. More than 60 Doxey people are involved in one way or another. All of the groups to address the tasks to be undertaken have been formed and most have had their initial sessions. Local professionals are mentoring them in learning the necessary skills. Members of the Mikron company will be visiting Doxey in the first part of the week beginning 7 February, to meet local people with stories to tell about Doxey, to enable the Mikron researcher and writer to build up a picture of the village and to start writing his play: Village Voices.

Already some of the objectives of the project are being achieved. People are learning skills. Social networks are improved. Young people are getting involved in their community.

The performances in Doxey will take place on Saturday, 30 April and Sunday, 1 May. After then Mikron will rewrite the play for its company of four actors and take it on tour across the country as one of the two productions in its summer and autumn season. Already bookings have been made for Village Voices.

This is a project which more people in the West Midlands area needs to hear more about.

Ends

From the press and publicity officer for Doxey Community Association

Stephen Moore

Tel: 01785 251622

E-mail: stephen_moore@ntlworld.com

57 Doxey, Stafford ST16 1EE

Further information can also be obtained from Doxey Community Association's Arts Officer

Jane Essex.

Tel: 01785 621453

E-mail: JANEEESSEX@aol.com