

PRESS RELEASE

Award-winning Theatre of Sanctuary Curious Monkey bows out after decade of creative impact

[Curious Monkey](#), the North East-based theatre company and charity, has announced that it will be closing in early 2024, after more than 10 years making theatre with under-represented communities notably young people with experience of the care system and people seeking sanctuary in the UK as refugees and asylum seekers.

The leadership team of **Amy Golding** (Artistic Director) and **Jenny Dewar** (Executive Director), who founded the award-winning company together in 2012, have taken the difficult decision to close the company and move on to new opportunities amid a challenging funding environment.

Amy Golding said: “After more than a decade creating and delivering productions and creative activity with under-represented communities, we have made an incredibly difficult decision to wrap up the company. While we have gratefully received core funding from a number of trusts and foundations over the past few years, the prospect of returning to running an organisation from hand to mouth, without core funding, is no longer viable in the current economic and political climate.

“The way we work takes time to build trust, needs to be done with care and the right resources to support our team and participants. Without those resources in the longer term we decided to take a positive step to close Curious Monkey with care; and find new ways to have an impact.”

Jenny Dewar added: “We are so proud of what we have created, the accomplishments of the company, all the brilliant people involved and the impact the charity has had on many people’s lives.”

“We will celebrate Curious Monkey’s impact in the North East and beyond by creating an event on 15 March at Gosforth Civic Theatre. It will be a moment to come together for staff, artists, collaborators, participants, co-creators and most of all the communities we have worked with over the last decade.”

The company, the first arts organisation of sanctuary in the region, is currently touring an acclaimed production [Penguin](#) created by Syrian refugee and disabled artist, Hamzeh Al Hussien, of which The Stage’s critic wrote:

“An uplifting tale of resilience and joy, brought to life with irrepressible charm by co-creator Hamzeh Al Hussien (making his professional debut) ... who joined Curious Monkey’s Arriving project, which facilitates the creativity of those seeking sanctuary, in 2018. It is sobering to think that without such a project we might never have seen this remarkable story, illustrating just how vital such programmes are, and how much richer theatre is thanks to them.”

“Penguin is the perfect example of Curious Monkey’s work,” says Amy Golding, “because it uncovers hidden artistic voices and stories - Hamzeh’s story living in Za’atari refugee camp in Jordan for six years, before arriving in Gateshead six years ago. Hamzeh joined our [Arriving project](#) shortly after arriving in the North East. Our long-term projects have provided consistency, creativity and joy to people who have found themselves living within and navigating broken social systems, supporting them to make changes through the power of stories and theatre.”

Chair of Trustees, Dr Caroline Murphy commented: “Curious Monkey’s creative vision has always been fuelled by the people we work with, people whose voices have been ignored too often and for too long. At a time when this work is so urgently needed, it is with great sadness that we have taken

the decision that closing the company next year is the right thing to do in the current funding climate. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported Curious Monkey and contributed to our work over the last decade, in particular I'd like to thank our funders past and present, our brilliant staff team and freelance collaborators, our inspirational founders Jen and Amy who have led the company with such passion, purpose and care for the last 10 years, and my fellow trustees."

Participant/collaborator quotes:

"Curious Monkey is a family where I feel comfortable, a close friend where I can share all my stories, the laughter, the jokes and the difficult and sad bits... Curious Monkey helped me achieve my first step in my life in theatre as a professional artist. This was my dream from when I was in the refugee camp." **Hamzeh Al Hussien**

"Was such a powerful day, changing the system for those that come after me is all I've ever wanted to do. It's not something I could've done without Curious Monkey, thank you!" **Alanis Miller - Care Leaver and Troupe Alumni / Facilitator delivering 360 films and training to social workers at Leeds City Council.**

Stakeholder quotes:

"It is vital to make sure that there is legacy from the amazing bar that Curious Monkey have set for arts and sanctuary work in the city and beyond". **Rosie Tapsfield - City of Sanctuary Lead at Newcastle City Council.**

"I have always considered Curious Monkey to be one of the most sincere, mission-driven, and impactful cultural players that I have had the pleasure to encounter on my journey through the sector. The work has been relentlessly uncompromising, affecting and important to some of the most disadvantaged, alienated, and mistreated communities in our country" **Nick Williams, Founder, Living Archive**

Live Theatre Artistic Director Jack McNamara writes about Curious Monkey and the Arts Council England National Portfolio funding decisions, one year on, in the upcoming Arts Professional (4 Nov).

Notes to Editors

Available for comment: Joint CEOs Amy Golding (Artistic Director) and Jenny Dewar (Executive Director)

Available images/video: [LINK to folder](#)

Briefing Notes

Curious Monkey has built a body of work over the last decade, highlights include:

- In recent years engaging with 300 - 500 participants per year.
- Creating 11 productions, six that toured the UK, one as far as South Africa. One feature film, six artist development programmes and four immersive VR experiences.
- Running 4 Care about Care? conferences and training social workers, foster carers and other care professionals to make improvements in the care system.

- Employed a team of five core staff to deliver their work, worked with 30 - 50 freelance artists every year and partnered with over 50 organisations.

Penguin continues its national tour until 30 November, with dates at Sheffield Theatres (9 and 10 November) and Arts Centre Washington (30 November). See links to reviews of the show below:

- [The Stage](#)
- [Narc Magazine](#)
- [The Reviews Hub](#)
- [I Love Manchester](#)
- [Disability Arts](#)
- [West End Best Friend](#)

Troupe (the regular creative group for young people with experience of the care system) will finish in December 2023.

The Arriving Project (a project running regular creative groups for people seeking sanctuary as refugees and asylum seekers) will finish in March 2024.

There will be a Curious Monkey celebration event held at Gosforth Civic Theatre on Friday 15 March, with details and tickets to be released soon.

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