



Annual Report 2015

The Opening Doors Association continued to grow and flourish during 2015. The voluntary organisation went through some changes in personnel, and was heavily engaged in the final implementation of two important EU projects, ART-is and Creative Ways, both of which had been funded through a number of national and European programmes.

During an Extraordinary AGM held on 19th February 2015, a new President, together with a new Board, were elected. Prof Joanne Butterworth was elected as President and took over from Lou Ghirlando, a founder member of Opening Doors, who stepped down after seven years of dedicated, generous and committed work for the organisation. Sara Polidano, Justin Spiteri, Leanne Fenech, Kevin White, Brian Gauci, Sandra Mifsud, Nicole Cuschieri and Charlotte Stafrace were elected as members of the new Board. In recognition of his dedication and commitment to Opening Doors Association, Toni Attard was invited to become a Patron to join Patron Janatha Stubbs.

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held on the 24th September 2015, where Leanne Fenech and Kevin White stood down from the Board. Grateful thanks were given to both for their contributions; whilst Leanne remains a member of the Dance group, Kevin White has stepped down from the organisation because of pressure of work.

The achievements and the implementation of important projects in 2015 could not have been possible without the funding secured through national programmes such as the Premju tal-President għall-Kreattività, the Malta Arts Fund, Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission, Y4U (Aġenzija Żgħażaġh) and the Voices Foundation. During the year, the organisation also received generous support in kind from the Fondazzjoni Ċentru għall-Kreattività at St James Cavalier, the Manoel Theatre, Alison White Studios and The Box, Mosta.

In 2015, Opening Doors signed a five-year collaborative agreement with Fondazzjoni Ċentru għall-Kreattività at St James Cavalier. The two organisations have committed to work together to develop an inclusive strategy plan which incorporates targeted events and activities; to establish an inclusive ethos with creative partners and staff; and to draft cross-collaborations with national and international networks.

Opening Doors, as a voluntary organisation, was also able to move its administrative base to the Malta Centre for Voluntary Services at 181, Melita St, Valletta, where we are able to hold our monthly Board meetings.

In September 2015, Opening Doors Association was invited to make a statement at the Cultural Forum organised by the Malta Arts Council and held at the new Parliament Building in Valletta. Our statement was read out by Sara Polidano, member of the Theatre group and a Board member.

The support detailed above has enabled Opening Doors to achieve important milestones in its development, such as:

1. The engagement of Directors on a contractual basis;
2. The design and development of educational training programmes and creative workshops in each of the three disciplines, leading to a number of performance opportunities;

3. The provision of new training opportunities and experiences for performers and professionals;
4. Further opportunities to reach new audiences and establish new partners.

1. Directors

- 1.1. Sandra Mifsud was engaged as Artistic Director of Opening Doors this year, an important step in the organisation's statutory objective to create ongoing training opportunities for people with learning disabilities and to develop artistic skills that manifest in expressions of artistic quality. Sandra also continues as the Dance Group Director and will initiate further creative development and performance opportunities with the dancers of OD Dance Group.
- 1.2. Anna Formosa continued as Theatre Group Director until July 2015. The new Theatre Director, Andrea Gracini, an experienced theatre practitioner, joined Opening Doors in October 2015 for the new academic year, to facilitate the training programme for the actors and to continue with their creative development.
- 1.3. Luke Baldacchino, a profession percussionist and applied music practitioner, launched our first Music group as Music Group Director with a season of drumming workshops.

2. The Artistic Groups

2.1 Dance Group

In 2014, Opening Doors Association embarked on a new creative journey focusing on the dance discipline, providing dance training to a number of participants with learning disabilities. This followed the project Dance for Inclusive Art in 2013 (funded by the Premju tal-President għall-Kreattività and implemented in collaboration with The Rubberbodies Collective), which was a first step towards including individuals with learning disabilities in dance performances.

The development of the dance genre and the eventual establishment of the Dance Group in 2014 required an ongoing programme delivered by creative professionals, support workers and volunteers as well as a lengthy process to ensure that all participants are involved and engaged in the creative work. Dance practitioner Sandra Mifsud was engaged on a contractual basis to lead this group from February 2014.





During 2015, the Dance Group has continued to flourish under her guidance, with assistant Rachel Calleja and volunteer Ilona Attard. The Dance Group meets on Fridays at the Manoel Theatre Studios to pursue creative and choreographic work. This group also receives generous support from the Alison White Dance Studios, where they attend a weekly ballet class at the studios each Monday, in order to build their technique. During the year the members had several opportunities to perform.

2.2 Music Group

During 2015, Opening Doors received funding from the Voices Foundation to begin a Music group. In September 2015, Opening Doors held an open Percussion workshop at St James Cavalier, led by Music Director Luke Baldacchino, in order to identify new members for the latest development, the Opening Doors Music Group. A group was formed in October 2015, meeting at The Box in Mosta, with the generous support of Christina and Daniel Cauchi. The Music Group experienced its first performance in December 2015.

2.3 Theatre Group

In line with its aim to provide new training opportunities for the performers and assist them in their artistic and creative development, in January 2013 Opening Doors engaged Anna Formosa on a contractual basis, as Theatre Group Director to facilitate the training programme for the actors and to continue with creative development. During 2015, the Theatre Group had many opportunities to perform in Malta and Europe as part of the EU funded projects, ART-is and Creative Ways, led by Anna.



In the summer of 2015, after a busy and dedicated two years, Anna Formosa stepped down to pursue a new project with senior citizens. In October 2015, Opening Doors engaged the Theatre practitioner Andrea Grancini to continue and extend the good work of the Theatre Group.

3. Providing new Training Opportunities

3.1 Opening Doors Association is aware of the skills gap there is in the provision of training for people with learning disabilities to engage in the arts, for artists interested in enhancing the accessible potential of their own work, and for professionals working with adults with learning disabilities in using the arts within the context of their own work. In order to address these needs, Opening Doors Association has continued to carry out a number of short drama and dance workshops designed by the creative team and assisted by the artists within the group.

3.2 In January 2015 the young actors of Studio 18 and their leader Jean-Marc Cafa delivered a series of



workshops to the Drama Group. They enjoyed sharing and exchanging experiences, new ideas, generating a lot of energy and fantastic memories. In March 2015, an enjoyable workshop was delivered by collaborator Clive Piscopo, actor and writer of Freespirit ACTING, who shared new games and exercises with the Theatre Group. In addition, a visit was arranged for Sandra Mifsud to attend workshops with the Amici Dance Theatre Company based at The Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith, UK, a well-established integrated group of disabled and non-disabled performers led by Wolfgang Stange.

4. Reaching new Audiences and Partners

4.1 World Dance Day – 29th April - Dance Jam

Opening Doors held its first outdoor Dance Jam in St Anne's Square, Sliema, on Friday 29th April 2015 to celebrate World Dance Day. Dance and Theatre members attended, and were guided in a number of different dance styles from Belly dancing to Ballroom, and from Contact Improvisation to Contemporary dance. We were delighted with the levels of attendance, and will arrange several more of these events in different locations around the islands in order to raise awareness of our association.



4.2 Opening Doors also continues to increase its visibility at a national level. We maintain regular contact through our Facebook page, and engage with the media to promote the Association, its project and artistic events. In 2015 Opening Doors had the opportunity to participate in various tv and radio programmes and its work was regularly featured in The Sunday Times of Malta. The Facebook page is a useful resource for Opening Doors to disseminate information with regard to its projects and achievements achieved by means of its work, in an attempt to promote its ethos and share its vision (see photos below).

4.3 **Project ART-is, in collaboration with St. James Cavalier, Centre for Creativity**

Opening Doors Association, working in partnership with St. James Cavalier, Centre for Creativity, organised two major events which both culminated on the same day in Valletta. From 12th – 14th June, all our major events culminated in the celebration of the ART-is project, the culmination of two major EU projects, ART-is and ART-is+, over a 3 years from 2013 to 2015, funded through the European Union and European organisations, all of which work with people performing arts.



The ART-is title stands for Inclusion and Self-development of adults with learning disabilities through the (performing) ARTS. The eight European organisations were: Cultural Centre Leopoldsborg (Belgium), Solheimer (Iceland), AFANIAS (Spain), Keski-Pohjanmaan Opisto [Folk High School] (Finland), Heart 'n Soul (London) and Stay Up Late (Brighton, UK), Autokreacja Foundation (Poland) and Guroymak Association of Protecting the Mentally and Physically Disabled (Turkey), and Opening Doors and St James Cavalier (Malta).

The long-term aim behind ART-is has been twofold: for trainers and professionals to exchange methodologies and share best practice, to learn from each other and to create a high quality output. The project has created numerous opportunities for the learners to meet and to stimulate their cultural participation, their personal development and individual fulfillment. Opening Doors participated in meetings/workshops held in Iceland (October 2013), Belgium (August 2014), Spain (November 2014), and Poland (March 2015), and Malta (June 2015).

Opening Doors was delighted to welcome 120 young adults, directors and volunteers to Malta, and to provide several enjoyable and fulfilling activities for them, as well as devising and sharing a performance at SJC together, which was attended by Marie Louise Preca, the President of Malta. On Friday morning a Dance Jam was held in de la Vallette Square with our visitors and a group from the Wardija Resource Centre; having started rehearsals, we were invited to a Tea party at the home of the British High Commissioner and his wife, to celebrate the Magna Carta. On Saturday we worked together to continue the creation and rehearsal of a 45-minute performance, given that evening. And on Sunday we visited the city of Mdina, and even managed a visit to the beach at Armier. OD board

members and directors, together with Maria Spiteri as SJC programme manager and numerous volunteers, handled much of the organisation for the visit.



4.5 **Project Creative Ways**

Opening Doors entered into another one-year multi-lateral European partnership called Creative Ways, with organisations from Spain, Turkey and Germany. This project aimed at exploring theatre as a means of expression and inclusion for people with learning disability. Members of the Theatre Group participated in meetings held in Turkey (November 2014) Germany (April 2015) and Malta (June 2015).

Creative Ways was also supported by the Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission and received additional support from the Malta Arts Fund.

Opening Doors is proud to have hosted all ART-is and Creative Ways partners during the same weekend in June 2015.

4.6 **Project Different Artistic Abilities in collaboration with the Wardija Resource Centre**

Opening Doors has again collaborated with the Young Adult Education and Resource Centre in Wardija in a project called Different Artistic Abilities funded by Kreattiv (Malta Arts Fund). The collaboration

involved Sandra Mifsud and Douglas Comley who, on behalf of Opening Doors Association, led a number of dance and creative movement sessions with the aim of devising an artistic piece to be performed in May and in June 2015. This group also joined the Dance Sharing held in de La Vallette Square on the morning of 13th June 2016, to welcome ART-is and Creative Ways partners.

Our partners from Belgium wrote: Thank you very much for the unforgettable festival and final ART-is meeting last week! Let's keep in touch and let's never break the bonds between Opening Doors Belgium and Opening Doors Malta!

Weekly creative dance sessions continued at Wardija in October 2015 for the new scholastic year.

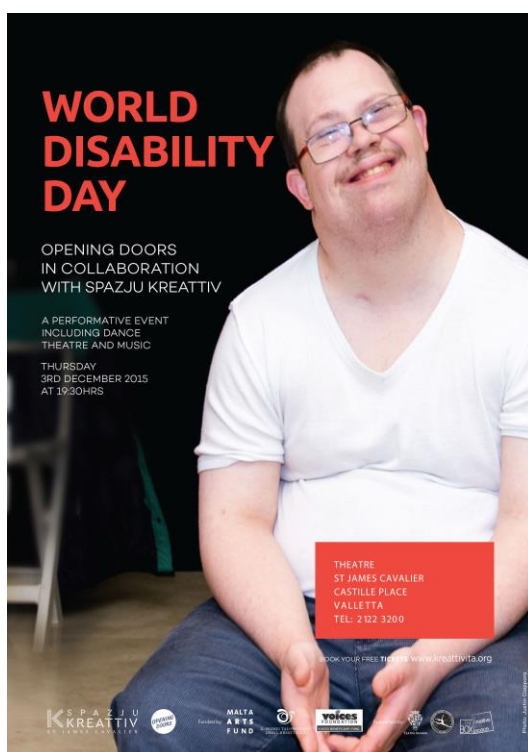
4.7 World Disability Day

After the summer break, artistic activities resumed in October with our three groups. Each group was working autonomously on an item to be performed in celebration of World Disability Day on the 3rd December 2015 at St James Cavalier's theatre.

This event also included guest performers Maria Mifsud from Alison White Dance Studios,

Therese Caruana, and Pippa and Steven from Malta Wheelchair Dance Sport Association.

This performance was followed by a small gathering with all our members, invitees, parents, volunteers and board members, to celebrate our achievements.





5. In Conclusion

Opening Doors works tirelessly to fulfil its vision and mission in promoting artistic opportunities for persons with learning disabilities. However, to realize this aim requires not only innumerable hours of volunteers' time, who generously commit themselves to us, but also the creative input and artistic expertise of paid professionals who bring to fruition the dreams and wishes of Opening Doors' growing artists. Opening Doors Association is still a very young and small organisation but with big dreams and it depends completely on the financial support of funding programmes to implement its initiatives and projects. We thank all those who gave support in 2015.

Prof. Joanne Butterworth

President

15/03/2016