

Annual Report 2014

The year 2014 was yet another important year for Opening Doors Association during which it continued to grow as organisation, went through important changes and was engaged in the implementation of important projects designed in 2013 and funded through a number of national and European programmes.

During the AGM held on 9th June 2014, amendments to the Statute were approved as well as a new President and a new Board were elected. Lou Ghirlando was elected as President and took over from Toni Attard, who decided to step out of the role due to other commitments, whereas Sara Polidano, Justin Spiteri, Leanne Fenech, Kevin White and Brian Gauci were elected as members of the new Board. A few changes in recognition of his dedication, hard work and commitment since the inception of Opening Doors Association, Toni Attard was given the title of Patron to join Patrons Janatha Stubbs and Prof. Jo Butterworth.

The achievements and the implementation of important projects in 2014 could not have been possible were it not for the funding secured through national programmes such as the *Premju tal-President għall-Kreattività*, Organisation Support Grant and the Kreattiv by the Malta Arts Fund, Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission and Y4U (Aġenzija Żgħażaġh).

This support enabled Opening Doors to achieve important milestones in its development, such as:

1. exploring new artistic genres and launching its first Dance Group;
2. providing new training opportunities for the performers and the professionals;
3. reaching new audiences and establishing new partners;
4. engaging an Artistic Director on contractual basis, a Theatre Group Director to facilitate the training programme for the actors and continue with the creative development, and a Dance Group Director to launch Opening Doors' first dance group; and,
5. developing an artistic theatrical season.

1. Exploring new Artistic Genres – the Dance Group:

Following a successful five-year process to develop a theatre programme and establish a permanent theatre group, in 2014 Opening Doors Association has embarked on a new creative journey focusing on dance, thereby providing dance training to a number of participants with learning disabilities.

This was as a follow-up to the project *Dance for Inclusive Art* (funded by the Premju tal-President għall-Kreattività and implemented in collaboration with The Rubberbodies Collective), which was the first step towards getting dance to include individuals with learning disabilities. The project led to a public



performance in June 2013 and was presented in front of the President of Malta during the award ceremony of the Premju tal-President għall-Kreattività in September 2013.

The development of the dance genre and the eventual establishment of the Dance Group in 2014 required and still requires 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.

2. Providing new Training Opportunities:

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 carried out a number of short drama and dance workshops designed by the creative team and assisted by the artists within the group. To this effect a number of training sessions were organized for the Theatre Group actors during the period January to May 2014 (see photos below).



Likewise, during the period February to May 2014, a series of training sessions were organized for the Dance Group artists (as evidenced by the photos below, which were taken by Alexander Sobolla) leading them to perform for the first time in public in May 2014.





Opening Doors Association

Inclusivity – Artistic Development – Accessibility

In May 2014 Salvo Pitruzzella – a renowned dramatherapist – has led a dramatherapy workshop for professionals in the field with the title *Between Smoke & Crystal*.

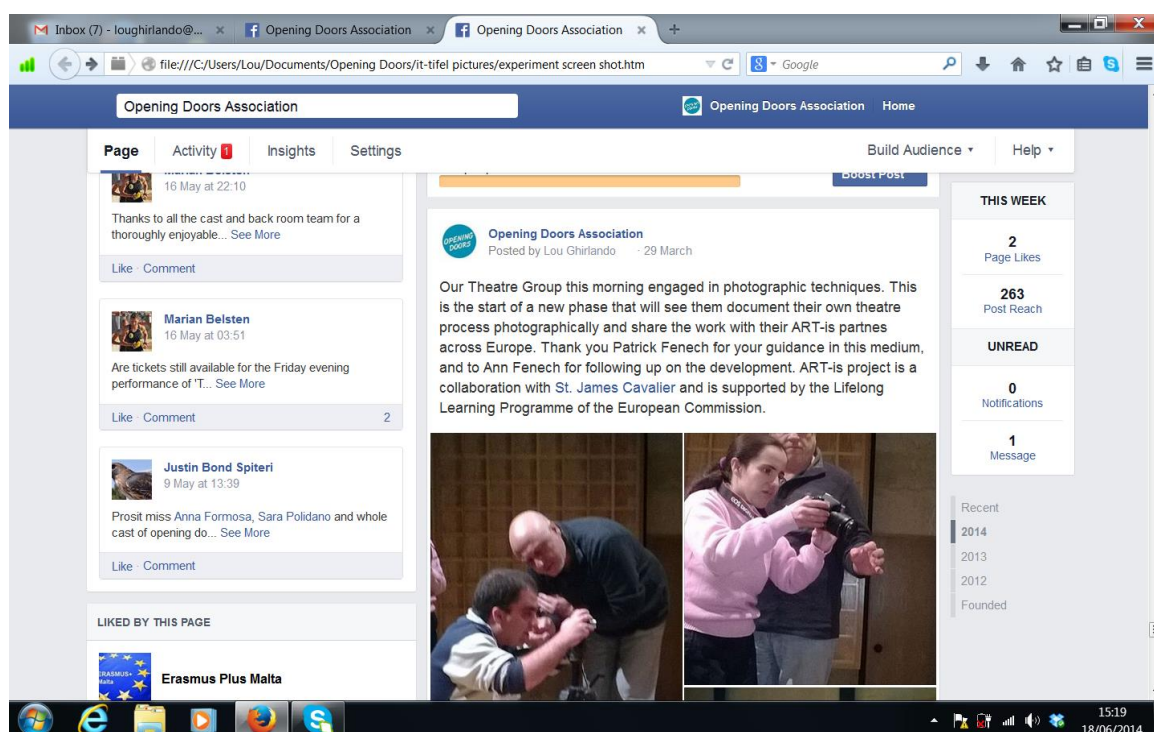
3. Reaching new Audiences and Partners:

In a drive to reach out to new audiences and partners, Opening Doors Association continues with its attempt to increase its visibility at a national level. Apart from maintaining regular contact through its blog and facebook, and engaging with the media to promote the Association, its project and artistic events, in May 2014 Opening Doors organised its second forum entitled *The Aesthetic Spectrum: Opening up the Stage to Performers with Intellectual Disabilities* with Salvo Pitruzzella as the key note speaker (see adjacent photo).



Opening Doors has also had the opportunity to participate in various tv and radio programmes and feature its work on TVAM, Kaskata Kulturali (RTK), Ugwali F'Kollox (RTK), Eli in the Morning (Net TV), and Prizma (Campus FM).

The facebook 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).





Opening Doors Association Inclusivity – Artistic Development – Accessibility



4. The Engagement of an Artistic Director

The engagement of Lou Ghirlando as the Artistic Director on contractual basis (August 2013 – July 2014) has been instrumental in the running of Opening Doors' administrative and creative operations, in the development of the theatrical season, and in the design, implementation and overseeing of the various projects in 2013 and 2014. Apart from these, the role also entailed the securing of the necessary funding for any new projects and to seek other financial resources to maintain the programmes of the Association.

Among the artistic responsibilities the Artistic Director has seen to the following:

a) Project #oss in collaboration with Guardian Angel School

The project entitled #oss was awarded funding from the Kreattiv Programme in September 2013 and was implemented in 2013 and 2014 in collaboration with Guardian Angel School. The project played on the duality of the Maltese word that can mean both 'touch' and 'sound'.

The Guardian Angel School had installed an OptiMusic system – an audio-visual system which is featured in the photo below – and was interested in exploring innovative ways in creating sequences that can also reflect the Maltese context. The aim of the project was to explore



science, literacy and numeracy through sounds, stories and rhythms created by artists, students and teachers. The outcome of the project was to be integrated in the OptiMusic system with a legacy that can be used by the School in the coming years.

As outcome of the project a cd resource was completed in order to be disseminated with other schools and centres equipped with the same technology.

b) Engagement of a Theatre Group Director and a Dance Group Director

In line with its aim to provide new training opportunities for the performers and assist them in their artistic and creative development, Opening Doors has engaged, on contractual basis, Anna Formosa as the Theatre Group Director to facilitate the training programme for the actors and continue with the creative development, and Sandra Mifsud as the Dance Group Director to launch Opening Doors' first dance group.

c) Performance *It-Tifel, is-Saħħara u l-Prinċipessa*

It-Tifel, is-Saħħara u l-Prinċipessa was the fifth performance by Opening Doors' Theatre Group to be staged at St. James Cavalier. The actors once again led its audience to that shadowy and magical space between reality and fantasy, into a fairy-tale kingdom where anything can happen. The recurring themes in this work were once again those of love and friendship, allowing for the message that 'love conquers all' to come through. *It-Tifel, is-Saħħara u l-Prinċipessa* was presented under the direction of Guest Director Coryse Borg and Theatre Group Director Anna Formosa. Training and preparations for the performance took place between January and May 2014, with the final performances being held on the 16th, 17th and 18th May.

d) Launching of the Dance Group

On the 17th and 18th May, the theatre performance *It-Tifel, is-Saħħara u l-Prinċipessa* was followed by a demonstration from Opening Doors' Dance Group under the direction of Sandra Mifsud. This was the group's first performance in the public and it was well received. The group has been working on this performance since February 2014.

The above photo features both the Theatre Group and the Dance Group together after their respective performances.



e) Project *DANCE-is Ability*

Following the launch of the Dance Group in May 2014, Opening Doors committed itself to see to the artistic development of this second group which entailed not only the continuous training of the performers but also to secure that the artistic self-development of the dancers was paralleled by opportunities for them to perform.

To this effect, Opening Doors managed to obtain funds from the Premju tal-President għall-Kreattività for a project called *DANCE-is Ability*, with the aim to see the members with intellectual disabilities within the Dance Group develop and grow in their potential as performers and ability to perform a full-bodied performance.

To this effect, the project will ensure the development of technique that will allow for a product of stronger artistic quality and that will speak louder to our audience of the ability of adults with intellectual disabilities to be performers. In line with this, the Dance Group was engaged in creative movement workshops, developing technique in free movement and improvisation skills, and furthermore, was engaged in basic ballet technique at a mainstream dance studio, namely Alison White Dance Studio. The final target of this project will be for the Dance Group to devise a full dance piece that can stand alone as a performance and which will be performed at the Disability Arts Festival in June 2015.

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



The 2-year project ART-is, which is still running, is being funded through the Grundtvig programme, and it stands for Inclusion and Self-development of adults with learning disabilities through the (performing) ARTS. This project is a partnership of 8 European organisations which work with adults with learning disabilities in the field of performing arts (theatre, dance, music, etc.).

The organisations in partnership with Opening Doors and St. James Cavalier, Centre for Creativity are:

Cultural Centre Leopoldsburg (Belgium), Solheimer (Iceland), AFANIAS (Spain), Keski-Pohjanmaan Opisto [Folk High School] (Finland), Heart 'n Soul and Stay Up Late (Brighton, UK), Autokreacja Foundation (Poland) and Guroymak Association of Protecting the Mentally and Physically Disabled (Turkey).

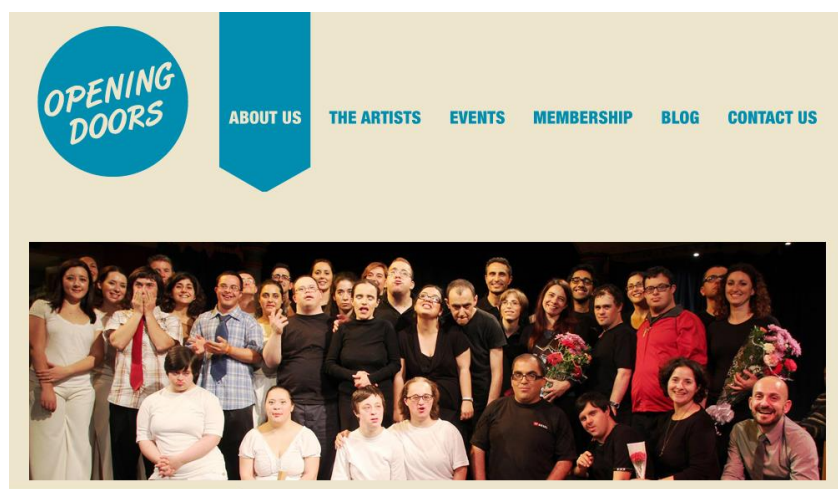
The aim behind *ART-is* is twofold: for trainers and professionals to exchange methodologies, share best practice and learn from each other and also create output that has a high quality; and to create opportunities for the learners (all with special needs) to meet and to stimulate their cultural participation, their personal development and individual fulfillment.

Opening Doors has participated in meetings/workshops held in Iceland (October 2013), Belgium (August 2014) and Spain (November 2014), and will be participating in meeting in Poland (March 2015). This project will culminate in a disability arts festival in Malta (June 2015).

g) Project Creative Leadership in Action

This project, which was being supported by Aġenzija Żgħażaġh under its Y4U scheme, saw 3 of Opening Doors' Theatre Group members develop their leadership skills through the facilitation of 8 workshops at Wardija Resource Centre during the month of June under the mentorship of Ms Anna Formosa. This is a line of development which the Theatre Group is keen to pursue, allowing the further dissemination

of Opening Doors' ethos and offering creative opportunities to other individuals through the leadership of our own practitioners.



This project also supported the development of the Association through the means it has provided for Opening Doors to launch its official website, as well as it has provided funding for first aid training for the Association's team leaders which is essential in ensuring the health and safety of its practice.

h) Project Creative Ways

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

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

i) Project Different Artistic Abilities in collaboration with the Wardija Resource Centre

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

see Sandra Mifsud who, on behalf of Opening Doors Association, will be leading 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.

5. Development of a Theatrical Season

As explained earlier in the report, Opening Doors is committed to work towards establishing a regular arts programme. Indeed, in 2014, Opening Doors has planned to develop yet another theatrical season for its Theatre Group, with the final performance taking place in May 2014, and has also seen to the setting off of its Dance Group, which made its first appearance in public in May 2014.

The development of the theatrical season and its implementation has claimed much of the energy of the Board of Opening Doors but most primarily of the Artistic Director who had to ensure that the development of the artistic groups was in line with the mission and vision of Opening Doors. Such was secured through the engagement of appropriate professionals to direct the Theatre Group, thorough training and mentoring of their work, facilitation of their transition within the group of the well-established theatre performers, and constant supervision of their work and of the development of the drama programme. In the case of the Dance Group, a lot of the work went into engaging once again the right persons to set off the new group, setting up the group of participants, facilitating the launch of the new group, and overseeing the development of the dance programme.

The official launch of the Theatrical Programme for 2014 was held in October 2013, which took place at St. James Cavalier.

In Conclusion

As can be noticed, Opening Doors works hard to fulfil its vision and mission and to promote artistic opportunities for persons with learning disabilities. However, this requires not only innumerable hours of volunteers' time who commit themselves to realise this 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 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.

Basil Camp

Brian Gauci

