



Annual Report 2017

1. Introduction

The Opening Doors Association continued to develop and flourish during 2017, its ninth year, and went through some exciting changes both to its funding structures and to the ways in which it manages and organizes its artistic programmes. Opening Doors, as a voluntary organisation, continues to use the Malta Centre for Voluntary Services at 181, Melita St., Valletta as its administrative base, where we are able to hold our Board meetings, but we have this year also signed a collaboration agreement with Teatru Salesjan, which affords us such support as office and meeting space, and a performance venue.

At the start of the year, the following individuals were members of the board: Prof Jo Butterworth (chair), Brian Gauci (Treasurer), Sandra Mifsud (Artistic Director) Sara Polidano (vice-chair), Charlotte Stafrace, Justin Spiteri and Patrick Wirth. Group leaders were Rachel Calleja (Dance Group), Andrea Grancini (Theatre Group) and Luke Baldacchino (Music Group). Assistants during 2017 included Ilona Baldacchino, Jacob Piccinino, Mariele Zammit, Estelle Farrugia, Benji Cachia, Marie-Elena Farrugia, Martina Buhagiar and Doriene Catania.

Our two Patrons, Janatha Stubbs and Lou Ghirlando have continued to support the organisation.

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held on the 29th March 2017 at Aġenzija Żgħażaġh St Joseph High Road St Venera SVR 1012. Dr Anne-Marie Callus from the University of Malta Department of Disability Studies, and Andrea Waltzing (nurse with experience of disability) were both nominated and voted in as new Board Members. A number of our members, parents, supporters and collaborators attended, including Giuliana Barbaro Sant, who ran our Crowdfunding Project with support from ZAAR, and singer Gianluca Bezzina who acted as the ambassador for the initiative. The Crowdfunding Project was launched in March 2017 with a promotional videoclip by Rodney Gauci from Three Wise Men Media; it ran for two months and raised in excess of €2000 (which was our target).

The achievements and the implementation of important projects in 2017 could not have been possible without the funding secured through national programmes such as the Cultural Partnership Agreement, Premju tal-President għall-Kreattività, (both of these are three-year funding agreements), the Malta Arts Fund (for *The Staging of 'Aħdar id-Deżert'*), the Voices Foundation, Creative Communities (for the OD Symposium) and Cultural Export Fund. During the year, the organisation also continued to receive generous support in kind from the Fondazzjoni Ċentru għall-Kreattività at St James Cavalier, the Manoel Theatre, Alison White Studios and St Albert the Great College in Valletta.

Opening Doors continued its five-year collaborative agreement with Fondazzjoni Ċentru għall-Kreattività at St James Cavalier (Spazju Kreattiv), which was signed in 2015. The two organisations have worked together on targeted events and activities, to establish an inclusive ethos with creative partners and staff, and where possible to draft cross-collaborations with national and international networks. In 2017, we also signed a collaborative agreement with Teatru Salesjan, and began a fruitful collaboration specifically for supporting the artistic work of the organization, and providing a venue for rehearsals and performances.



2. Cultural Partnership Agreement

In the autumn of 2016, we received the first tranche of funding from the Cultural Partnership Agreement three-year funding initiative. Strand 2 was addressed to organisations active in the cultural and creative sectors addressing any of the following areas:

- Venues and spaces managed by the organisation that foster clustering and collaborations including artist-in-residency programmes;
- Specialised creative work with any of the communities identified in the strategy (children, youth, the elderly, 'hard-to-reach' groups, people with different abilities, people from different ethnic backgrounds).

The three-year partnership provided a stable support for the OD organisation to plan ahead, grow, develop and deliver ACM's strategic goals primarily addressing creative professionals and communities, namely to:

1. nurture creative potential and support its development into professional activity;
2. invest in artistic excellence;
3. connect Malta to the international artistic community;
4. provide more opportunities for people to engage in creativity.

3. OD Development

All the support detailed above has enabled Opening Doors to achieve and maintain important milestones in its development, such as:

1. The engagement of an Artistic Director, 20-hours per week, on a contractual basis;
2. The engagement of Group Leaders and Assistants in Dance and Theatre, also on a contractual basis (CPA); The design and development of educational training programmes and creative workshops in these disciplines, leading to a number of performance opportunities;
3. The continuation and funding raised (Premju Tal-President) for engagement of the Music Group leaders and assistants, as well as the design and development of educational training programme and creative workshops for this discipline leading to a number of performance opportunities
4. The provision of new training opportunities (CC and CEF) and experiences for performers and professionals, in particular in a collaborative, devised performance;
5. The establishment of the OD Ensemble group, 13 members from three disciplines (funding from V18, to be received in 2018), and,
6. Further opportunities to reach new audiences and establish new partners; for example, through holding a Symposium (Nov 2017) with lectures and workshops from experienced practitioners in the field of performing arts and disabilities. OD is preparing a publication to combine these presentations with chapters from some of our own leaders and assistants.



4. Directors

Sandra Mifsud was formally engaged as Artistic Director of Opening Doors in September 2016, supported by the Cultural Partnerships Agreement (see below), on a part-time 20-hours per week basis. Throughout 2017 Sandra continued to commit to the organisation's statutory objectives to develop artistic skills that manifested in expressions of artistic quality, and to create ongoing training opportunities for people with learning disabilities.

Rachel Calleja, the Dance Group Leader has continued to further creative development and performance opportunities with the dancers of OD Dance Group. Andrea Grancini continued as Theatre Group Leader to facilitate the training programme for the actors and to continue with their creative development. Luke Baldacchino, a professional percussionist and applied music practitioner, continued as Music Group Leader with a season of drumming workshops. Each of these leaders is supported by paid assistants and by volunteers. All four leaders also worked together to provide artistic leadership and re-stage OD's collaboration involving all members (see below).

5. The Artistic Groups

Dance Group

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 (see below). From October 2016, the core activities of the Dance Group have been funded through the Creative Partnership Agreement. In October 2017, four members moved into the OD Ensemble and a number of new members were able to join the group from our waiting list.

Music Group

The Music Group was formed in October 2015, meeting at The Box – A Creative Arts Space in Mosta. The Music Group experienced its first performance in December 2015 and has continued to develop their technique and awareness of working in ensemble. They completed the project *Heart is Music* (funded through the Voices Foundation) in July 2016 and continued their work in October 2016 thanks to funding for the *Drumline* project, supported by *Premju tal-President għall-Kreattività*. The core activities for 2017 were covered by another project (*Learning through Drumming*) with funding from the Voices Foundation. In October 2017, five members moved into the OD Ensemble and a number of new members were able to join the group from our waiting list.

Theatre Group

From October 2016, the core activity of the Theatre Group has been funded by the Cultural Partnership Agreement. Jacob Piccinino (a graduate from Lecoq, Paris), Estelle Frugia and Mariele Zammit all contribute as assistants when required. In October 2017, five members moved into the OD Ensemble and a number of new members were able to join the group from our waiting list.



6. Devising and Collaborating

During 2017, all three groups continued to develop their contributions to *Aħdar id-Deżert*, a devised work shared amongst a team of 39 people including directors, assistants, volunteers and student members. Funding was received from the Malta Arts Fund for The Staging of *Aħdar id-Deżert*, which allowed the OD organization to:

- **develop the story-line** by creating more intricate connections between characters and scenes in the current script. Developing characters, their context and the intention behind their actions within our story;
- support our artistic team and performers in the creative process of devising by **allowing more rehearsal time** and by re-assessing **engagement criteria for our performers** to maximise ownership of the work;
- **improve on quality** by continuing our work on performance technique, stage presence and projection;
- **improve production levels** by developing a better-planned design and sourcing of costumes, set, props, lighting and sound equipment;
- **work in an established theatre** that can accommodate all our performers, that has the flexibility that we need to work comfortably in an extended pre-production phase and that accommodates our work effectively;
- continue to **tour the performance** between March and May at Day Services as a form of rehearsal and to continue to reach new audiences.

Aħdar id-Deżert was envisaged as a vehicle for Opening Doors to expose its work to various communities, marketing its services amongst Day Services with the aim of recruiting more student members and extending our reach to more people, breaking down barriers and misconceptions related to disability and exposing the public to appreciate different aesthetics in performance. *Aħdar id-Deżert* was also considered as an opportunity for its members to continue to develop their creative, artistic and performance skills in a safe but challenging environment. Three performances took place at Teatru Salesjan in May 2017, supported each performance by groups of either experienced musicians or dancers: The Ranch, The Tailors, and Alegria.

Aħdar id-Deżert helped the performers to develop their technical artistic skills, such as learning lines and improvising, as well as fostering personal skills such as confidence, dedication and teamwork. It was an opportunity for the wider community to witness how a group of talented, committed and engaging students could come together to present an artistic work that was entertaining and of high creative quality. The production was unique in the way it ensured that the students were the stars of the show, with all other performers being guests, supporting acts that served to highlight the talents of the main cast. *Aħdar id-Deżert* was therefore considered successful in reaching both its ambitious artistic aims and its progressive social aims.

The Restaging of *Aħdar id-Deżert* has led to the performers, artistic and production teams of Opening Doors Association being nominated and shortlisted for Best Project in the Community at the Arts Awards, to be held at the Manoel Theatre on 23rd March 2018.



7. Reaching new Audiences and Partners

Opening Doors continued to hold performance Jams in the open air. In 2017 we held two dance/music jams, the first in Paola on the 10th April, and in Sliema, on 28th April 2017. The majority of Dance, Music and Theatre members attended, and were guided in a number of different dance styles, drumming and physical theatre workshops. We were delighted with the levels of attendance. These Open Air Jams are an ideal way of introducing the work of Opening Doors to a wider audience.

8. Media Coverage

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 2017 Opening Doors had the opportunity to participate in various tv and radio programmes, including videos prepared by Arts Council Malta, and its work was regularly featured on local print media. 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). We also continue to update our new website for the organisation at www.openingdoors.org.mt thanks to the work of Jesmond Darmanin of Storm Design. Our Crowd funding campaign was a good vehicle to reach out to companies. ZAAR advised us to have some donation tiers dedicated specifically to businesses; this really worked as we started to build a relationship with Greenpak, P. Cutajar and St. Michael's Foundation/School. Our relationships with Spazju Kreattiv and Teatru Salesjan also generate valuable media coverage.

9. Projects with other Entities

Young Adult Education and Resource Centre, Wardija

In 2017 Opening Doors has again collaborated with the Young Adult Education and Resource Centre in Wardija in a project. The collaboration involved Sandra Mifsud and Douglas Comley who, on behalf of Opening Doors Association, led a number of dance and creative movement sessions. Weekly creative dance sessions continued at Wardija for the scholastic year October 2016 – June 2017. Music sessions were also added to the Centre's curriculum in October 2016, led by Luke Baldacchino, and continuing through 2017, Opening Doors was teaching 8 sessions per week at the Centre (4 sessions in Dance and 4 sessions in Music).

In October 2017, a new programme commenced, this time involving dance and theatre sessions funded through Kreattiv. These sessions will lead up to a performance in May 2018 as part of the school's yearly event: Celebration Day.

Day Services (Aġenzija SAPPOR)

Services have been rendered to Aġenzija SAPPOR in 2017 for Drama Sessions by Andrea Grancini at Hal Far Day Centre; Dance Sessions by Doug Comley at Cottonera Day Centre; and Percussion Sessions by Luke Baldacchino at Paola Day Centre.



Summer Sessions (Aġenzija Żgħażaġh and Skola Sajf)

During summer, 8 sessions of Theatre Sessions were held at Aġenzija Żgħażaġh Youth Village during July and August.

Also during the summer months, Theatre, Dance and Music Sessions were held at Helen Keller, San Miguel, Guardian Angel Resource Centres and Ta' Sannat Special Unit.

10. Administration

In 2016 Opening Doors revised its membership fees; as from January 2017 the annual fee for the Individual Membership was €15 and the Family Membership fee was €30 annually.

During 2017, the Board of OD has been discussing the sustainability of our organization. After 10 years of giving free weekly sessions to our performers, we are considering introducing relatively small charges on an annual basis for all our groups. Ideas will be suggested and discussed at the AGM on 20th March 2018.

11. In Conclusion

Opening Doors continues to work 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. During 2017 we have seen the pressure that this has placed on our leaders and Board members.

After 10 years, 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 need to further consider our sustainability in the next decade. However, as usual, we give our inestimable thanks to all those who gave support to us in 2017.

Prof. Joanne Butterworth

President

14/03/2018