



Press Release 13 October 2011

AUTISM AND THEATRE: AN INDUSTRY INSPIRATION DAY

A timely industry wide Inspiration Day for theatre staff and autism experts took place on Monday (**10 October**) at London's **Unicorn Theatre**.

“**Autism and Theatre: An Industry Inspiration Day**” was aiming to achieve long-lasting cultural change and build on the exceptional access work that already exists within the UK theatre industry. It will also serve as a launch pad for similar regional venue awareness days and establish future ongoing engagement between local theatres and families affected by autism.

Over 200 delegates from across the industry attended the Inspiration Day which provided an opportunity to openly discuss the subject of autism in forum and break out sessions, identify the challenges facing families, theatres and performers, learn about best practice for the future and hear from inspirational guest speakers who have personal experience with these issues.

The event was chaired by **Jodi Myers** and **Jonathan Meth**. Guest speakers included ATG's Joint Chief Executive, **Rosemary Squire OBE**, children's playwright, producer and Chair of Action for Children's Arts, **David Wood OBE** and CEO of the National Autistic Society, **Mark Lever**.

Jane Asher, President of the National Autistic Society and a keynote speaker on the day, said: "As an actress, and as someone who has been involved with autism for over thirty years, I hate to think of the profession I work in being unwelcoming to those affected by autism. This potentially devastating condition is serious, lifelong and disabling and can make it extremely difficult for people affected by it to enjoy activities like trips to the theatre. Making adjustments and training staff can make a huge difference and it's great to see my industry come together to mount this 'Inspiration Day'. I hope it will lead to more theatres across the UK engaging with local people affected by autism and make the magic of live performance available to as wide a range of children and adults as possible."

Jonathan Meth, Co-Chair on the day, said: "This was a fantastic opportunity for the theatre industry to come together and explore how it can improve the experience of families with members on the autistic spectrum, coming to their theatres. The intention was to galvanise the sector into holding a series of regional conversations with their audiences, to further engage with concerns and celebrate best practice. We lead the world in many areas of arts and disability, but we still have a long way to

go and much to do. While the day was focussed on those with Autistic Spectrum Conditions, we hope it was both an inspiring and practical day for all those who want to make the experience of different people coming into their theatres an excellent one.”

The event was a partnership between **the Ambassador Theatre Group Ltd (ATG)**, the **Unicorn Theatre**, **National Autistic Society (NAS)**, **Action for Children’s Arts (ACA)**, **Theatrical Management Association (TMA)** and the **Society of London Theatre (SOLT)**. Further partners involved in supporting the day included **Ambitious About Autism** and the **Institute of Entertainment and Arts Management (IEAM)**.

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Editorial Notes:

- **Images** available on request
- **Jodi Myers** has been an independent consultant, working with a wide variety of organisations across the arts, in both the publicly funded and commercial sectors, since 2005. She also works regularly as a mentor/coach and occasionally as a consultant executive theatre producer. She is currently independent chair of the **National Dance Network**, an artistic assessor for **Arts Council England**, a governor of **Central School of Speech and Drama**, and a member of the board of directors of **Graeae Theatre Company** and **Propeller Theatre Company**.
- **Jonathan Meth** is currently working as Strategic Development Consultant with **Theatre Is...**, He is Associate Tutor on the MA in Arts Administration and Cultural Policy at the **Institute of Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship** at Goldsmiths, University of London and Founder and Director of **The Fence**, a network for playwrights and cultural operators across Europe and beyond. He is also a parent trustee at **Ambitious About Autism**.