PlayWell: Preventative Care in the Creative Industries 2022 Report

Foreword

In recent years, there has been a growing understanding of the impacts of toxic working cultures in the Creative Industries. In response to movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo and the impact of the pandemic on all workers; institutions and individuals have started to examine past failings in working conditions and attempt to repair the damage caused.
But recognising a problem is not the same as solving it, and harmful working practices continue to impact us as individuals and organisations.

One of the most urgent issues we face is our sector's continuing mental health crisis. But did you know that Creative Industries workers are three times more likely to suffer from mental ill-health than the rest of the population? This includes depression, suicidal thoughts, and self-harm. [1]
We at PlayWell want to highlight new and active ways to prevent mental ill-health for workers in the Creative Industries and encourage more responsibility of care from organisations. While it is essential to address crises when they arise, we believe that more can be done to stop crises from happening in the first place. And to do this, we need to understand the factors that impact mental ill-health in our sector.

We believe that preventative care can help us become healthier and happier – as people, as workers, and as a sector. And so, with support from the Arts Council England (ACE) and The Mayor's Office at the Greater London Authority (GLA), we carried out a 12-month research project into the need for preventative care and support in the Creative Industries to understand what is currently available.
Our research highlights that most people feel that stressful working conditions – including rushed timelines, low and late pay, precarious contracts, and systemic abuses of power – negatively impact their mental health. And though our industry as a whole already recognises we have a problem, many organisations continue to perpetuate these working conditions, fail to provide support for their workers, or even acknowledge the need.

How can we bridge this gap between what we know as individuals and how we act as a community?

At PlayWell, our aim is not to replicate existing ideas, processes and information, but to aggregate the knowledge that already exists, to create a clear and accessible base for positive action. We hope that sharing this knowledge and examples of recommended preventative measures will help us think about our collective responsibilities and power. Informed by this research and our continued work within the industry, we have developed a new role of a Preventative Care Consultant; a creative who consults directly with cultural organisations to embed preventative care and safeguarding strategies into your working culture. You'll find more information on Page 12 on how we can support your organisation.

Lauren Silver
Founder of PlayWell

About us

PlayWell was founded by Lauren Silver, a jolly-anxious clown and Preventative Care Consultant.

We work with people, from local communities to global companies, to support and promote positive health and wellbeing. Our focus is on keeping people well through playful and engaging programmes including live theatre, interactive workshops and consultancy.

Clients Include:

Young Vic
China Plate
Pleasance Theatre
Mental Health UK
Relate
Rethink Mental Illness

Survey Results

Methodology

The findings presented in this report are based on the results of our research from the below methodology:

- PlayWell Preventative Mental Health Care 2021 Survey Results
- Analysis of access riders and budgeting protocols for access collected from organisations
- Consultations and group discussions with non-disabled and disabled freelancers
- Interviews and audit processes were conducted with members of Senior Management from five arts organisations
- Interviews with Specialist Support Practitioners
- Analysis of own lived experiences of working in the performing arts industries as a disabled freelance artist
- Academic research on performing arts disability processes and practices
- Creative Freelancers: Shaping London's Recovery 2022 Report

Support and Funding

Arts Council England
HM Government
LEAP
Mayor of London
Fuel Theatre

About the Survey

PlayWell devised the Preventative Care survey in 2021 as part of our twelve month ACE-funded research project into the status of mental health support and duties of care within the Creative Industries. The GLA also supported this process via the Creative Freelancers' Cohort. The survey intended to take a "temperature check" of industry conditions.

We called for responses from anyone working in the UK Theatre and Creative Industries who had:
- become unwell during a project because of working conditions
- experienced a lack of care from an arts organisation, directly or indirectly
- experienced excellent care from an arts organisation, directly or indirectly

The survey was available online for eight weeks, from 21st August to 19th October 2021. It was aimed at freelancers, full-time employees and part-time employees and was completed by 157 people. It was shared via various networks, including:
- SOLT and UK Theatre Members Newsletter (48 UK theatres and 25 Affiliate theatres)
- Young Vic Genesis Network (1500 Members)
- Spotlight Twitter (100K Followers)
- Parents and Carers in Performing Arts Twitter (4K Followers)
- Freelancers Make Theatre Work Socials (11K Followers)

All quotes highlighted throughout are taken directly from the survey participants' anonymous comments. Please note: the results include details of ill-health, discrimination and sexual abuse, so please take care whilst reading.

Press Coverage

Interview for BBC Radio Merseyside

The Stage, interviewed by Lyn Gardner

The Problem

Nearly half of respondents (49%) have had to seek professional mental health support because of working conditions in the Creative Industries.

And only 30% of those people had reported a pre-existing mental health condition.

> "Generally employers talk a good game re mental health; very good at putting on shows about the subject and encouraging audiences to show solidarity and sympathy, when showing none themselves in relation to their own workers."

The Causes

The causes of mental ill-health in our industry are complex and intersectional. The culture enables practices that have a detrimental effect on our mental health.

80% of respondents experienced neglectful, defensive or controlling practices at work
75% experienced barriers or burdens caused by systems, people and bureaucracy
60% experienced serious misconduct or abuse
44% experienced stigma, prejudice and discrimination

> "Most jobs I have worked have involved union violations; one has involved sexual abuse."

> "I have always been far too scared to talk openly when asked - I feel like I would immediately be labelled as a 'problematic' company member."

> "Administrative errors with payments, lack of transparency about creative process, lack of care from make up departments and bullying."

The Impact

53% of respondents cited a loss in income directly related to mental illness which was exacerbated or caused by work in the Creative Industries.

> "I received no pay [while on sick leave for mental health reasons], which worsened my mental health even more."

> "I think there's something of the cyclical about it: experiences that I've had have impacted my income, which has then impacted my mental health, and that has further impacted my income."

> "There is no time for mental health [support] on a theatre job."

49% have had to seek professional mental health support, because of working conditions in the Creative Industries.

> "Following a long period of overwhelming workload, tight deadlines and a changing and unclear job role, I came to the point of burnout. I was signed off with anxiety and depression, prescribed anti-depressants and recommended by my GP to self refer for talking therapy."

"Work related stress led to therapy and 18 months on anti-depressants. Eventually I left the job and the city due to being overwhelmed."

"It's hard to pin my stress and anxiety to any specific thing - they're more to do with surviving in the industry as a whole."

Additional Comments from Participants

On discrimination:

"Stigma remains acute! Sometimes disclosures are weaponised against the artist to 'keep them in tow."

"Menopause is a huge mental health issue for women in late 40s and up – and is rarely discussed on mental health conversations."

"Discriminatory and belittling behaviour towards me both in relation to my disabilities and my sexuality."

"I experience classism everyday - as a working class senior leader I have experienced from established leaders who are only interested in middle-class people."

"Lack of care around discrimination as a result of pregnancy."

"This company followed a general attitude from all other company members that it was OK to make homophobic, transphobic, and racist 'jokes' backstage."

On sexual harassment:

"Sexually harassed and advised not to take the complaint any further."

"I have had more unsolicited shoulder massages from male directors than I can possibly count."

"I was sexually harassed in an interview."

"As a teenager I experienced predatory sexual behaviour, grooming, sexual assault, during work experience at a theatre."

"One time when I was still packing away after a rehearsal and everyone else had left, I bent down to pick something up and he hit my bottom with his hand, and said in a mocking voice: 'You mustn't bend over when I'm around mate, you know what I'm like."

On poor working culture:

"Toxic working environments with 70 hour weeks expected. Told working too hard then told not working hard enough."

"I worked a job where we never knew our hours - working 12 hour days, being asked to stay late, work 7 days a week, work in different venues every day all over London."

"Primarily I think the issues were organisations more interested in protecting themselves than the people working for them."

"Annoying phrases such as 'the show must go on' 'you have to suffer for your art' don't help. Things I have had said to me: 'Don't call in sick unless your leg is hanging off', 'say yes to everything', 'just power on through' etc."

"So many of the issues I've experienced regarding mental health in employment - that do not stem from systemic oppression and prejudice - are because employers did not have this support in their careers."

On late payments:

"Payment was late and below the National Minimum Wage, and when this was brought up we were emotionally blackmailed and made to feel that we were betraying the company and didn't care about the project."

"Late payments are nearly a given."

"I suffered from repeated late payments on one job, leading to cash flow issues, stress and a reluctance to work for that client."

On bullying and abuse:

"There has long been the excuse that bullying behaviour is just the 'artistic temperament' of geniuses and that we are all expendable and should feel grateful for the opportunity of work, no matter what we're expected to put up with along the way."

"I think drama schools are where a lot of abuse, neglect and malpractice begin, not to mention tolerance and acceptance of them."

"As a musician, I have regularly experienced bullying from conductors. I've also experienced ageism. I have also been told that I am expendable and that my rights are meaningless."

What support is available?

83% of respondents said there was no support available to help with their mental health needs, before, during or after a crisis point.

>"Generally in the past it has been expected that you will ask for it rather than it being offered."

65% of respondents said that senior leaders do not understand or prioritise mental health.

>"I find that after the request for information, it is often really difficult for the organisation to follow up with actual support."

One of the major criticisms expressed in our survey was that support only becomes available when things have already gone wrong.

>"Support is a reactionary method, not a preventative."

>"Support is often crisis based rather than improving general conditions."

What works?

17% of respondents had positive experiences of mental health support at work. They cited a positive engagement with crisis support, for example: therapy or counselling, in addition to adequate sick pay.

And preventative support:

>"Flexibility with working hours."

>"Having tea & fruit on hand for mood crashes."

>"Culture of openness about mental health."

>"Proper Breaks"

>"Offering me a taxi if public transport is stressful."

The View from Organisations

Alongside this research into how workers feel, PlayWell has worked closely with several arts organisations to understand institutional practices. We interviewed members of senior management, surveyed full and part-time staff and reviewed existing processes and policies within the organisational structures.

Where mental health support is available, it most often takes the form of Mental Health First Aiders and Employee Assistance Programmes, accessed when a worker has become unwell. Where access support is available, the onus is placed on workers to identify themselves and their needs. And, where appropriate policies do exist, they are often not communicated well or not communicated at all.

Staff member surveyed by PlayWell as part of an organisational review:

> "I haven't been made aware of any support, resources and services available to me."

Organisations tend to focus on specific problems rather than systemic change – associating care with individual needs rather than industry practices. This can also mean that support is seen as a burden, rather than a positive part of a working culture.

This is why organisations adopt a crisis-management approach rather than prevention. It means that organisations perpetuate structural issues as industry norms that put pressure on us all.

Staff members surveyed by PlayWell as part of an organisational review:

> "As a cultural leader it is assumed that you just shoulder the challenges and emotional material of colleagues and peers; but rarely, if ever, has the organisation asked what support I need."

> "I've recently had trouble relating to mental health, and I was only able to discuss this with my line manager, but felt as though this was a lot to unload onto one person, as fantastic as they were in dealing with the situation."

What Next

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on our research and are not mutually exclusive. They range from short-term actions to longer-term strategies that require further exploration, discussion and investment.

Our industry already recognises we have a problem. Industry bodies, including Equity, BECTU and PIPA, are driving improvements in working practices, and some employers are developing comprehensive offers of support for their employees. At PlayWell, our aim is not to replicate existing ideas, processes and information, but to aggregate the knowledge that already exists, to create a clear and accessible base for positive action.

At PlayWell, we're not interested in quick wins or tick-boxes; this work is about bringing understanding, respect and empathy to support long-term change, and we will work with you to embed these practices into your organisation. Together, we believe we can achieve a happier and healthier industry.

Short-term

Facilitate a company-wide discussion of this report:
Make sure your Senior Management Team and Trustees acknowledge the mental health crisis in our sector, and the impact of toxic working cultures. Encourage an open dialogue within your organisation. Work together to advocate for preventative mental health care for everyone you work with.

Implement basic care practices for the office and the rehearsal room:
Examples include: scheduling regular breaks, allowing flexibility in start and end times for workers, facilitating mid and end-point check-ins for everyone.

Medium-term

Budget for access provision in all project planning:
Allocate a minimum of 20% of all budgets for relevant company training, access, and care. Training can include PlayWell Preventative Care; access can include BSL Consultants engaged at the start of a creative project; care can include Dramatherapists embedded into all your work.

Prioritise health at the heart of policymaking:
Create guidance and company policies that prioritise mental health; examples include policies to support Mental Wellbeing, and to root out Bullying, Sexual Harassment, Racism, Antisemitism and Islamophobia. Review regularly and ensure clear visibility of reporting points and complaints procedures.

Long-term

Advocate for transparency and ethical responsibility with payments and contracts:

Become an accredited Living Wage Employer and adhere to industry-standard fees, payment timings and contract structures negotiated by union bodies (e.g. Equity, SOLT, BECTU, Musician's Union, ITC, Stage Management Association, SDUK).

Prioritise ongoing organisational development training:
Become a member of an independent arts management organisation such as ITC or UK Theatre. Invest in training, guidance and HR support for regulated working conditions in-line with industry best practices.

Preventative Care Consultancy

Our report indicates a widespread need for preventative care and mental health support among workers in the Creative Industries, but organisations and employers are not meeting this need. Our work with organisations tells us that mental health care tends to be reactive rather than proactive. When support is available, it is focused on emergencies rather than prevention.

But organisations are made up of individuals. How can we bridge the gap between what we know we need as people and what we feel we can provide as a community?

At PlayWell, we see preventative care as more than just a set of policies. It is a strategic imperative for a positive working culture. Preventative care may produce the most significant impact on people's health and wellbeing compared to responsive measures [2]. It can make people feel safe, respected and listened to. It builds cultures for people to thrive in, which means it plays a vital role in helping us be creative, experimental, and bold. This approach also acknowledges that mental health care is a collective responsibility.

We all have a role to play in supporting ourselves and others. By confronting the factors that impact our mental health and maximising the ways we can protect each other, we will be able to reduce the mental health crisis in our industry.

Informed by our research, our founder Lauren has developed a new role of a Preventative Care Consultant; working directly with cultural organisations to advise and embed preventative care and safeguarding strategies into your working culture. By placing people and creativity at the heart of what we do,
we focus on improving the conditions, health and wellbeing of all staff and freelancers in your organisation.

From a company's day-to-day running to its rehearsal and performance periods, we help create joyful and safe environments that reduce stress and mental ill-health. We support senior managers and producers in understanding the moral, legal and financial responsibility to develop and maintain an excellent duty of care. We provide solutions, including company-wide Preventative Care Training and tailored support based on audit findings and reviews, ensuring everyone can work, play and stay well.

Working with us will help minimise the negative impacts of illness on people and organisations and create a supportive, nurturing and positive workplace for all.

If you would like to know more about our Preventative Care Consultancy, and how Lauren can work with you and your organisation, then pop us an email at:
hello@weareplaywell.com

Survey Participant information

What is your career role within the UK Theatre & Creative Industries?

Participants were assigned to groups and departments. The majority of participants in this research principally defined themselves with more than one career role and thus have been assigned as Multi-Disciplinary (n=49, 31.2%). For example 'Theatre maker/ Composer', Freelance Producer/ Outreach Coordinator/Administrator' or 'Writer/Director. N=4, 2.5% were grouped as Other (see below) and n=12 7.6% did not answer.

Multi-Disciplinary:	49
Performers:	31
Director:	8
Senior Management:	8
Marketing:	8
Producer:	5
Education:	5
Stage Management:	4
Lighting:	3
Set &/or Costume Design:	3
FOH & Box Office:	3
Musical Director:	2
Costume and Wardrobe:	2
Administration:	2
Community Theatre:	2
Writer:	2
Access Consultant:	2
Sound Designer:	1
Production Management:	1
No Answer:	12
Other:	
Comedy Manager	1
Film Crew	1
Choreographer	1
Photographer	1

Gender

Of the 157, 155 completed the question on gender, with 96 (61.1%) participants identifying as a Cis Woman and 38 (24.2%) identifying as male. Participants could tick as many options as preferred, culminating in 6 (3.8%) selecting multiple genders grouped under 'Other'.

Agender	2
Cis Female	96
Cis Male	38
Non-Binary	5
Prefer not to say	7
No Answer	3

Other:

Cis Woman, Genderfluid and Non-Binary	1
Cis Woman and Gender Queer	1
Cis Woman and Non-Binary	1
Cis Man and Gender Queer	1
Cis Man and Non-Binary	1
No Labels	1

Sexuality

Of the 157, the majority of 93 (53.2%) identified as Heterosexual/Straight. Participants could tick as many options as preferred, culminating in 12 (7.6%) selecting multiple sexuality answers grouped under 'Other'.

Bi/Bisexual	25
Gay	10
Heterosexual/Straight	93
Queer	7
Lesbian	2
No Answer	8

Other:

Bi/Bisexual, Gay and Lesbian	1
Asexual and Bi/Bisexual	1
Asexual and Heterosexual/Straight	1
Bi/Bisexual and Heterosexual/Straight	1
Bi/Bisexual and Queer	1
Gay and Queer	1
Queer and Lesbian	1
Queer and I don't know	1
Confused	1
Pan	1
No Labels	1
Don't think these labels and categories are useful	1

Age Range

In terms of age, there were more participants in the 25-29 age bracket than any other (n=27, 17.1%) with 89.8% of the sample under the age of 55. N=1 (0.6%) did not disclose their age.In terms of age, there were more participants in the 25-29 age bracket than any other (n=27, 17.1%) with 89.8% of the sample under the age of 55. N=1 (0.6%) did not disclose their age.

18 - 24	8
25 - 29	27
30 - 34	22
35 - 39	24
40 - 44	24
45 - 49	17
50 - 54	19
55 - 59	8
60 - 64	3
65+	4
No Answer	1

Ethnicity/Race/Heritage

Of the 157, the majority at 111 (70.7%) identified as White British. Participants could tick as many options as preferred, culminating in 17 (10.8%) selecting multiple answers. 7 (4.4%) identified as White British/White Other and the remaining 10 (6.3%) were grouped as 'Other'.

White British	111
Black	2
White British/White Other	7
East Asian / South East Asian	3
White Other	23
No Answer	1

Other:

Middle Eastern / West Asian / North African, White British and Welsh/English/Cypriot	1
	1
Black and White British	1
Black, Black British and Black Welsh (Welsh woman of African heritage)	1
White British and Scottish	1
White other and Eastern European Jewish. Irish Catholic. English	1
White other and Australian	1
South Asian	1
South or Central American	1
Mix - Eurafricasian	1
British Mixed Heritage	1

Acknowledgements & Signposting

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<u>Acknowledgements</u>

<u>Signposting to support</u>

PlayWell are proud ambassadors of The Hub Of Hope, the UK's leading free mental health support database. Provided by national mental health charity, Chasing the Stigma, The Hub of Hope brings local, national, peer, community, charity, private and NHS mental health support and services together in one place for the first time.

For more information head to hubofhope.co.uk or download the app for free.

<u>Keep in touch</u>

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