**What is The Kids Are Alright about and why have you chosen to have children performing in it?**

The Kids Are Alright is about loss, conflict and how we deal with crisis in our personal lives and in our communities. It’s also about the power of friendship, the resilience of humanity and finding humor when you least expect to be laughing. It’s about loss of childhood for children who find themselves affected by adult conflict, about the experience of two parents who have recently lost a child, it’s about the way we perhaps don’t think enough about children’s proximity to our adult created world. And it’s about how children are starting to ask for the change they want to see. The themes of The Kids Are Alright are universal and transcend borders of age, race, religion and culture.

The children are NOT ‘performing’ in the show, they are participating in their own, child appropriate audio experience which occupies the same stage space as the performance you are watching. We have chosen to place these two, separate shows on the same stage as their proximity to each other and the way that can impact on each other, we think creates a powerful metaphor and message. We want to generate a discussion with our audiences around the themes of childhood, loss and conflict and ensure during that we listen to children and adults equally.

**What is the story my child will take part in and can I read the script of the show?**

The children follow the story of a ten year old boy who is on a journey to find a new home. The boy is who they hear through their headphones, he is their narrator and we hope by the end of the audio experience, their friend and ally in adventure making. The journey they go on is rooted in the real experiences of the journey of a child who for many possible reasons finds himself searching for friendship, community and home. As this is a journey for 9 – 11 year olds, it of course also celebrates imagination and dips its toes into a fantasy world of strange animals, invisible boats and underground worlds.

An example of the script of the children’s journey will be provided in the programme and any adult that wishes to read it beforehand will be emailed a PDF version of the full script. We only ask you don’t share it with your child so not to ruin the surprise – as so much of their experience is rooted in them experiencing the journey for the first time.

**What will happen at the Manifesto Workshop**

**And why are you doing it?**

The Children’s Manifesto for Change is a fun and creative workshop that asks children to think about the *State of the Nation*, and contribute to a UK wide collection of children’s unfiltered thoughts and feelings about the community, country and world they live in.

We want children to think about and take charge of the change that they would like to see.

We are running this workshop as a way to meet children who care about the world they live in, who have huge imaginations and who understand the power of friendship.

We want to invite these children to take part in performance, The Kids Are Alright, a few weeks later, where they will experience the real and imaginary journey of a ten year old child seeking a new home and going on an adventure across countries and continents both real and imagined.

We want to work with these children to document their thoughts and ideas around themes of conflict, loss and childhood in an audio installation that will be presented to the audience of The Kids are Alright, before they go into see the show. This is our small way to let these children know we are listening and have heard. The workshop is run by practitioners who have experience in working with children of this age group.

**In what way will the children participate in the show?**

The children are NOT technically participating in the part of the show that is for an adult audience.

They are sharing the stage space and wearing noise cancelling headphones.

They meet the adult performers beforehand, in the pre-show workshop which enables them to feel confident and comfortable sharing space on stage.

The adult performers are both experienced youth theatre and dance leaders.

In the pre-show workshop they get to know the performers and creative team who will be supporting them to have an imaginative, fun and physical time.

After that, they wear their headphones and enter their own live audio experience.

They know the performers are performing and they understand there is a show for adults that they don’t hear but is related in theme.

They know they will be being watched by an adult audience.

During their audio adventure, they imagine the performers to be all sorts of interesting and fantastical characters on their journey.

**What will the children be doing on stage?**

On stage the children will be listening to and accompanying our live narrator on his adventures as he takes a journey to seek a new home and follow a friendship.

You will see them enact this journey physically and imaginatively

You might see them lying down, running, jumping, dancing.

You might hear them singing, but you won’t hear them talking

You might see them interact with the adult performers, because they are imagining they are characters in their adventure.

You might see them look at the audience.

You will see them laughing, listening and thinking.

**Who will be on stage with them and what will they be doing?**

Sharing the same stage space with the children are a professional actor and dancer. They play numerous different characters all related to the themes of loss, conflict, friendship and childhood. The performers will be moving, dancing and talking (acting).

**My child really wants to take part but he/she can’t dance. Does that matter?**

It doesn’t matter at all. They won’t at any point be asked to dance.

They might be asked to crawl through an imaginary tunnel, to chase a scarecrow, or explode into a million stars, or crawl into a suitcase and sneak onto a see-through airplane.

They might be asked to help our 10 year old boy find a new home. To think about how hard it can be for some children who have to go on long journeys through night and day to find a community or a friend.

You child only needs to want to take part and be aged between 9 - 11

**Why can’t my child’s younger/older sibling take part as well?**

The children’s audio experience is written for a particular age. Too young, and your child won’t have the focus to sustain the hour on stage. Too old, and they may feel self-conscious, or that the show is too young for them and unrelatable to.

We understand that all children are different and if you feel strongly that your child would like to take part we suggest you contact us and someone from the creative team can talk with you.

**If my child wants to take part in the show what is the commitment in terms of time?**

It’s necessary that your child attend the two workshops in the weeks prior to the performance. We find this is needed to help them engage in the project and gain valuable confidence in sharing a stage space with professional performers.

We also find it makes them really excited for the upcoming show. Taking part in the Children’s Manifesto for Change workshop will ensure they have their voice within the document that we hand back to them at the show as a recognition that we have listened and heard to their thoughts and ideas.

The Children’s Manifesto for Change workshop is only for children aged 9 - 11.

**Why aren’t you paying the children to perform?**

The children are not technically performing, they are taking part in a child appropriate audio experience that is for them only and shares the stage with adult performers in a separate show.

We understand that as you sit in the audience, you are viewing the children as performers, but the children are taking part in an immersive show written for them.

**Who will be responsible for them while they are on stage and what happens if they want to leave the stage?**

We have 2 designated adults on the night, who the children will be familiar with from the workshops. They will be sat with the audience and on the sides of the stage at all times to support the children.

Everyone in the creative team, including the performers are experienced youth arts leaders.

There is a 45 min workshop that takes place immediately before the show, that all children taking part MUST ATTEND. During this time the children get to know our creative team, the performers and understand they can leave the stage at any point and will be helped.

It is perhaps useful to explain that we create a space for the children on the stage during that workshop, that the children feel like they own and are in control of their choices throughout the experience. They can leave the space and will know how to do so at any point during the evening. It will feel like a playground of children into which two adults have wandered.

**Who are Encounter and what is your experience of working with children and vulnerable people?**

Encounter duo Jen Malarkey and Lee Mattinson.

Jen has delivered multiple dance and theatre projects in the community, working with adults and young people with a wide range of disabilities. She has trained teachers and school leaders on inclusive approaches to incorporating creative movement within the national curriculum and have been funded by Arts Council England to develop youth dance projects for children with physical, sensory and learning needs.

Lee has worked extensively in participation programmes across the UK, from verbatim projects with eleven-year-olds to acting as Lead Writer for Northern Stage’s Young Company and recently completed a yearlong project with Walker Technology College to devise a play about what it means to live in one of the most deprived wards of the North East.

Encounter has participation at its heart. We make contemporary shows about current topics that seek innovative ways to involve, embolden and engage the community.

**Why is the show for 16+ if it’s got children in it?**

The Kids Are Alright is 2 shows on 1 stage. One for adults. One for children. Both explore similar themes but through different content, different form and in age appropriate ways. The show that is for an audience aged 16+ contains narrative that could be deemed adult in nature, namely the grief experienced from the loss of a child.

There is NO swearing in this show and NO explicit violent or sexual content.

**I’ve heard there are parts of the show that are quite shocking. What happens if my child gets upset?**

There are some adult jokes in the show, and the themes of grief are adult by nature. However, from the child’s perspective, they don’t witness anything obviously aggressive, violent or sexual. The children are wearing headphones through which they constantly receive live narration through their own journey. These headphones cancel out all sound from the stage.

If they were not wearing headphones, they would not hear swear words for example. They would have to listen without headphones for a good 5 - 10 mins before they understood anything. And we would not allow that to happen.

**Will my child be safe?**

Your child will be safe both emotionally and physically and also, perhaps more importantly will feel in control, confident and in ownership of the space they are occupying for their audio journey. They will know how to ask for help, how to leave the space and how to rejoin should they wish. We aim for the space to feel and be child led and child owned.

**Who can I talk to if I’d like more information?**

philippa@fueltheatre.com

Jennifer@encounterproductions.org