<u>Wellbeing Policy</u>

General Statement of Policy

- Women & Theatre has a long history of maintaining a collaborative working environment where staff can share opinions, thoughts & ideas in an open and non-judgemental forum.

- W&T is committed to ensuring there is an organisational culture that is open and supportive of people experiencing stress or other forms of mental ill-health. W&T actively promotes flexible working and is committed to ensuring employees' working arrangements allow them to maintain an appropriate work-life balance.

- W&T recognises the importance of prevention and managing the root causes of any work-related stress that might occur.

- Women & Theatre has a duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its employees, freelancers & volunteers as far as reasonably practicable; and have in place measures to mitigate as far as practicable factors that could harm employees' physical and mental well-being, which includes work-related stress.

- Women & Theatre's performance on well-being and stress management will be assessed in the context of the HSE Management Standards.

- This policy adheres to Women & Theatre's **Equal Opportunities Policy, Health and Safety Policy, Work Review Policy, and Working from Home Policy.**

Responsibility

Everyone in the organisation has a responsibility to take an active part in their own wellbeing and in managing the risk of adverse impacts on their wellbeing.

- The Board take ultimate responsibility for the setting, and review of Policy

- The General Manager is responsible for its implementation in recruitment, business planning and in the day to day running of the Company.

- The designated Lead Artist and Artistic Director are responsible for ensuring that the Policy is practised within artistic delivery.

What is work-related stress?

This policy accepts the Health and Safety Executive definition of work-related stress as *"the adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them".* There is a clear distinction between pressure which can create a buzz and be motivating and 'stress' which occurs when this pressure becomes excessive. These may present in a number of ways including:

- Physical effects such as heart disease, back pain headaches gastrointestinal disturbances or various minor illnesses

- Psychological effects such as anxiety and depression.

The Health and Safety Executive have produced a number of *Management Standards* which cover the primary sources of stress at work that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and well-being, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. The Management Standards

approach is an organisational, preventative process for managing the risks to employees from work-related stress. These are:

- **Demands** – i.e. workload, work patterns and the work environment.
- **Control** – i.e. how much say the person has in the way they do their work.
- **Support** – i.e. the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
- **Relationships** – i.e. promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
- **Role** – such as whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.
- **Change** – such as how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated within the organisation.

These control measures will be used as a guide and prompt in risk assessing stress and work place wellbeing, through regular employee reviews, company meetings and operations planning procedures.

Home related stress

Although W&T are not legally responsible for stress that originates at home, we have arrangements that allow a staff member to address it. This might include signposting to counselling services, adaptations to the work or changes to work hours.

Working from home

As detailed in W&T's Working from Home policy, W&T recognises that working from home can be isolating and challenging. Staff may be under pressure, have childcare responsibilities or find it difficult to cope with minimal social contact. In any of these situations, they may find it hard to look after their mental health and wellbeing. W&T's commitment to improving mental health at work extends to working from home.

W&T urges staff to:
- take a full hour's lunch break away from their workstation and screen.
- take a 15-minute break every two hours away from their workstation and screen.
- take the time off when they are sick and do not keep working.
- do other things to stay mentally and physically active outside of working hours.
- Maintain communication with line manager if they need support around mental and physical health.

The Artist environment

W&T works in a range of settings including in-patient settings, prisons and community mental health centres, mainstream arts venues, schools and with marginalised communities and young people. The Company also delivers online participatory activity over Zoom. Each has the potential to impact on artist wellbeing in different ways:

- Artists will experience interaction and be subject to a range of experiences which could cause vicarious trauma.

- Working closely with people during the creative process, under often pressurised circumstances, can cause anxiety levels to rise. Working in venues / settings where different cultural structures and working practices may take precedence can be challenges for artists, volunteers and staff.

W&T recognises the different contexts the company works in and has strategies to minimise negative impact on our artists and their environment, including Check in and Check outs – at the

beginning and end of each session. Check-in/outs provide an opportunity for everyone involved in the creative process to express unresolved conflict, communicate worries, concerns and fears, and developing mutual understanding. The process also encourages empathy and open communication.

W&T has the responsibility to ensure artists and practitioners are fully supported in their working environment. They will do this by:

- Offering training for Core Delivery staff in vicarious trauma, to increase awareness, provide coping mechanisms and develop skills. Core staff members to share key information with freelance staff & volunteers, and give access to relevant resources.
- Ensuring adequate rest periods after strenuous projects.
- Scheduling cross organisationally to ensure there are contingency deadlines; scheduled staff time is adequate for tasks & does not cause undue overworking or stress.
- Facilitating regular work reviews
- Ensure we are aware of staff, freelancers and volunteers access needs
- Encouraging informal buddying relationships between volunteers
- Formalised reporting practices through project structures - e.g. evaluation methods
- Ensure all volunteers and freelancers have an induction before project commencement, so that they understand:
  - The mechanisms for feeding back experiences
  - Diversity awareness
  - Access to Safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures
  - The potential for vicarious trauma and importance of, & strategies for self-care.

W&T Employer Responsibility

W&T acknowledges the potential impact that work has on an individual's physical and mental health, and is committed to fostering a culture of cooperation, trust and mutual respect, where all individuals are treated with dignity. W&T also recognises that work-related stress has a negative impact on employees' well-being and that it can take many forms and so needs to be carefully analysed and addressed at an organisational level. W&T will do this by:

- Conducting risk assessments to identify all workplace stressors and eliminate or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
- Ensuring that we recruit individuals to roles within their capabilities and staff are fully trained to carry out their role
- Monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded or underutilised
- Discourage non-essential work-related contact with staff outside normal working hours or whilst on holiday
- Allow for regular breaks and ensure significant rest periods after strenuous projects
- Monitor working hours to ensure staff are not overworking & are taking their full entitlement of annual leave
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within their jurisdiction
- Be vigilant and offer additional support to a member of staff experiencing stress outside of work, e.g. bereavement or separation.
- Support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them and their management on a planned return to work
- Conduct inspections of the workplace and work reviews at least every 3 months to ensure environmental stressors are properly controlled.
- Encouraging staff to take responsibility for their own work and effectiveness as a means of reducing their own stress and that of their colleagues.

W&T Employee Responsibility

Employees will take an active part in assessing and managing their wellbeing and will do so by:

▪ Providing honest feedback when requested

▪ Monitor and plan their workload to ensure they are aware of points of pressure, and to communicate this clearly and regularly to the team

▪ Allow for regular breaks

▪ Monitor working hours and overtime to ensure they are not overworking; monitor holidays to ensure that they are taking their full entitlement

▪ Take responsibility for workload to ensure work-related contact with other staff or working outside normal working hours or whilst on holiday

This policy was reviewed & approved by Women & Theatre Board on 17 August 2021

List of resources

MIND
A charity providing advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem.
https://www.mind.org.uk/

Artist Wellbeing
Website of Artist Wellbeing Practitioner Lou Platt, incl blog posts from the industry on wellbeing.
https://www.artistwellbeing.com/

MAYK's Mental Health Policy
http://www.mayk.org.uk/news/mayks-mental-health-policy

Arts Minds
An information hub with practical resources for those working in the arts, set up by BAPAM, Equity, The Stage and Spotlight. http://www.artsminds.co.uk/

The Actor's Centre Mental Health Support
Weekly group sessions and monthly wellbeing drop in sessions for anyone working in the arts.
https://www.actorscentre.co.uk/about/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support

Playing Sane
A website dedicated to the relationship between mental health and acting, aiming to offer information and signposting to actors, their colleagues and carers across the industry.
https://www.playingsane.org/about/

Theatre helpline
24 hour confidential service providing advice & support for any theatre professional.
http://theatrehelpline.org/

UK Theatre and SOLT guidance, report and resources
Encouraging safe and supporting working practices.
https://uktheatre.org/theatre-industry/guidance-reports-and-resources/safe-and-supportive-working-practices/

Ita O'Brien
Intimacy Coordinator and movement director. https://www.itaobrien.com/

Stage Weight Wellbeing
Links, articles and posts around the wellbeing of artists by Dramatherapist Nikki Disney.
http://www.nikkidisney.com/stageweight