

Final report: Megaphone Writer Development Scheme. 27/06/2017

By Leila Rasheed

It was the best scheme I've ever been on.

- anonymous participant



1 From left to right, the Megaphone participants: Joyce Efia Harmer, Danielle Jawando, Alex Wheatle MBE (masterclass leader), Tina Freeth, Avantika Taneja, Nafisa Muhtadi

Megaphone opened for applications on 10/10/2015 and closed on 24/12/2015. Funding came from Arts Council England, the Publishers' Association and a donation from Melissa Cox. In-kind support came from publishing professionals and Writing West Midlands. 62 applications were received and 5 participants were chosen, based on merit, by myself and publishing professionals (a list of these can be found on www.megaphonewrite.com/whoisinvolved). The scheme began delivery in April 2016 and completed delivery in June 2017, over-running slightly. The scheme has come in under budget, primarily due to holding the final event at the London Book Fair 2017 rather than organising one in Birmingham. I hope to use money unspent on the final event to organise a second showcase event,

which will be aimed primarily at young adults and children, as part of the Birmingham Literature Festival in October 2017.

The one-to-one support was completely invaluable.

– anonymous participant

Megaphone has in my view mostly achieved its intended outcome of:

- 1) 5 completed high quality manuscripts for children/teenagers by BAME writers new to this area of fiction

And entirely achieved its intended outcomes of:

- 2) 5 writers who have developed artistically and professionally in the field of children's literature
- 3) 5 writers who are more likely to be published as children's writers after the scheme than they were before it, and more likely to be able to sustain a career as a children's author once published.

I have enjoyed writing the novel and I am enjoying rewriting it.

– anonymous participant

Of the five participants, two (Danielle Jawando and Joyce Efia Harmer) have secured representation by literary agents with strong track records (Jo Unwin and Madeleine Milburn) for the novels they completed during Megaphone. I would say this endorses their novels as 'high quality' and means they are highly likely to be published and reach a wide audience of children and teenagers as well as adults, in Britain and hopefully beyond. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾

Other participants have had short fiction for children/ teenagers published or broadcast (by *Scoop* (Nafisa Muhtadi), *Aquila* (Avantika Taneja) and *BBC Schools Radio* (Danielle Jawando)). In one case (Avantika Taneja) this is her first-ever publication credit, and in another (Nafisa Muhtadi) her

¹ Numbers in brackets refer to the relevant intended outcomes.

first print publication credit. In all cases these are first publications of children's literature arising from contacts that have been made directly or indirectly through Megaphone. (2) (3)

The London Book Fair was an excellent opportunity to showcase our work and gave us a fantastic leg up in terms of being seen and getting notice from the industry.

– anonymous participant

Although it is wonderful to have novels finding agents, I'd say that it is the investment in writers that matters most of all. All participants began from very different points and in very different personal circumstances, and changes in circumstance during the year sometimes affected their writing time. But all the participants have grown in skills, in confidence and in community. All participants have attested to the difference Megaphone has made to their writing skills, their confidence to approach the publishing industry, and their confidence in themselves as writers (2) (3). I believe these are the most important outcomes and will make them more resilient, and more likely to reach their writing goals in future. Participants' full written feedback is included in the full evaluation report and their verbal feedback can be heard in the Megaphone film at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1K2UrIZU2SQ&feature=youtu.be>

I feel more confident that I know more about writing for children, teens and young adults as a direct result of

Megaphone

– anonymous participant

The response from the publishing industry and related organisations such as Book Trust has been wholly positive and is something I hope to build on in the future. There have been no major

set-backs. Some elements have deviated from the original outlined scheme (eg, the decision to have the final launch event at the London Book Fair) but these have not been negative things. Feedback from the participants has identified that the masterclasses could do with more pre-planning and with being longer, something I agree with. Budget-wise, although overall the project was under budget, the biggest overspend was on travel costs for masterclass leaders and speakers, reflecting a range of costs for train travel across the UK.

From my own personal point of view, Megaphone has been an overwhelming, challenging and exciting roller-coaster of a learning curve. I feel proud and privileged to have seen these five writers grow and have thoroughly enjoyed reading every word they have written. I can only echo the participant who, giving feedback on the scheme, said:

Megaphone has been one of the best things I have ever done.

END

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