

Village Ventures is part of a network of over 40 rural touring schemes across the UK, providing access to high quality arts events for people in rural areas. The programme has brought professional touring theatre, dance and music to rural and community venues in Nottinghamshire for over 10 years, supported by local volunteers and promoters who select and host performances, sell tickets and publicise the shows. It is funded by Nottinghamshire County Council, the district councils of Nottinghamshire and Arts Council England.

## The Participant



Jean Cawthorne is 70 years old and lives in the small village of South Leverton in North Nottinghamshire. She was born in the house she lives in, as were her three children, and has always been dedicated to engaging with community life. Formerly a parish clerk and the village postmistress, she still does post office relief cover in the surrounding villages. She is currently a parish councillor and active member of the Women's Institute at South Leverton

Village Hall. She promotes Village Ventures performances at the hall.

In her younger days, before she married, she was active in amateur dramatics in Retford and has remained a member of a Retford choir. However, her involvement as a promoter for the Village Ventures scheme came about completely by chance two years ago, when her daughter gave her a Village Ventures leaflet:

"My daughter said, Mum, why can't you do something like this in Leverton? I looked at it and rang the County Council up and said what's all this about? The lady explained it and said a new prospectus was coming out for the autumn. That week we had a Women's Institute meeting and I took the leaflet and they said - well if you want to have a go, you have a go - we'll back you. And that's how it all started in Leverton".

"I've always tried to get things going. I just don't like to see South Leverton with nothing. That's just me."

## **Expectations and Reality**

*Village Ventures brings professional, acclaimed national and international touring companies to village halls and community venues. The surprise for Jean was just how good the performers were and how well the community supported it:*

“I was quite sceptical – I don’t think I really knew what to expect but I knew I had good backing from the Institute Committee, who were with me all the way. But I was sceptical that we wouldn’t get an audience like we did – I thought if we got 50 we were doing well. But we have exceeded 50 and every time we say ‘tickets only’ and we’ve sold out, we still get people turning up at the door and we get another chair in. We’ve never turned anyone away. It’s wonderful.”

*On the professional level of performance:* “I can honestly say in my wildest dreams I never anticipated them (the performers) to be so professional. Speaking for everyone else in the village, I don’t think that they did either. They are professional people – I kept saying they are professional people even before they started, because I’d read and spoken to the County team and they told me. And it was hard to understand – but now people just know.”

### ***Enjoyment through engagement***

*Jean struggles to find any downside to being involved in this arts project. Her only issue is sleepless nights over low advance ticket sales – people in the village tend to book late, yet the shows always gets audiences of 100 plus.*

### ***Evaluating the impact of participating***

*Jean has gained something from her role of promoter that she didn’t initially expect - a profound sense of achievement in bringing residents in the village together:*

“The main thing in Leverton is, it’s become a commuters village. Now when I was young, everyone pulled together if there was something going off like the Coronation or something like that...and it isn’t like that now. It’s a commuter village where the children go to school and the parents go to work and we don’t see them. But with Village Ventures we are beginning to pull more and more people together and we are beginning to get to know more and more of our residents.”

“I’ve enjoyed doing what I do and I love to go into that Institute when we’ve had a Village Ventures and people come out and they say that was fantastic! And it’s happened each time – people say how wonderful – what wonderful value for money. For me, that is what it is all about.”

She says her role as promoter makes her feel: *“Totally fulfilled. How wonderful to be able to do this. I love to see people enjoying themselves. I enjoy myself. I love my life and I love to see other people enjoying life and when they come to that Institute they do. It is wonderful to see them. I’ve been able to pull it off.”*

Engagement with the project contributes to her general well being. Her motivation is so high that a week after a recent major operation she still attended the Village Ventures performance. And she says she wouldn’t want to give promoting up: *“What else would I do? You have to keep it (the brain) working”.*

“It’s been inspirational – I can’t find enough words to say how wonderful I have found it – not for me, but for the Parish. And that has been my aim - to help South Leverton. I now walk through the village and people say – when is the next do? And you know exactly what they mean. Yes it has gone down very well.”