



### **Synopsis**

It's a big day in the Kalahari desert: it's Little Meerkat's first day on Lookout Duty. However, once she climbs the Lookout Tree she finds it all a bit overwhelming and falls asleep. When she wakes, all her meerkat friends and family are gone and a great big panic begins! With help from a Kind Elephant and a Wise Monkey can she learn to feel calmer and find those missing meerkats?

An award-winning magical musical multi-sensory adventure all about Calm and what to do with very big feelings. Based on the storybook by trauma parenting expert Jane Evans, this little tale helps everyone to see, hear, smell, taste and feel what's going on in their brains and bodies when emotions become overwhelming.



### **About the Show**

Co-produced with an Early Years Special Educational Needs consultant, 'Little Meerkat's Big Panic' is a self-contained production suitable for young children and those with complex needs. All multi-sensory elements are carefully cued and delivered to create beautiful and engaging effects that build children's confidence in accessing interactive theatre.

The production has been out on the road since August 2016 and has been seen by over 750 children to date in a range of settings including nurseries, preschools, theatres, community halls, festival fields and even someone's front garden! Touring is on a rolling basis with the production continually available to theatres, libraries, early years and primary settings as required.



Performances last 20 minutes and are followed by up to 30 minutes of sensory play exploring Calm; these workshops include free samples of low cost/no cost resources that children can take away. The show can be performed multiple times in succession, but usually between three and five shows per day. Most shows sell out, and our typical audience comprises mums with Under 5s, and group bookings from early years, primary and/or special school settings; we have also had some After School Clubs make group booking for performances in the late afternoon.

The production is suitable for 0-7s and children/young people with complex needs or disabilities; our youngest audience member to date was just three weeks old, and we have worked extensively with children with autism, sensory impairment, learning and physical disabilities. The production is signed in Makaton throughout, and every performance is 'relaxed'. We also follow the Family Arts Standards.

Many items in the set have been sourced from the Kalahari region, and the original songs are inspired by the traditional music of the San people.

The production was awarded Community Project of the Year by Luton and Bedfordshire Community Awards in 2016 in recognition of the production's innovative approach to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of early years children and their grown-ups. We were also award nominated by the International Youth Arts Festival in 2017.

### **Origins**

Funded by £450 of community crowdfunding from MK SOUP, the production was established on a not-for-profit basis to support the mental health and wellbeing of early years children and their grown-ups, especially around developmental trauma; all surpluses from performance fees are reinvested in the project for renewing consumables, and to develop new work that meets the identified emotional development needs of children.

### **Previous Performances**

Reading Room, Husborne Crawley  
Centre: MK  
Northamptonshire NIMP Conference  
Nene Valley Day Nursery, Northampton  
Hat Factory, Luton  
Rothesay Nursery, Luton  
Little Squirts Preschool, Flitwick  
Brighton Fringe Festival – 4 days, 3 sold out  
International Youth Arts Festival – award nominated  
All in the Mind Festival, Basingstoke  
Meltham Close, Northampton  
Festival of Giants, Milton Keynes  
INTU Summer Party, Milton Keynes



### **Future Performances**

2<sup>nd</sup> September 2017 – Little Foot Festival, Stanwick, Northampton

21<sup>st</sup> September 2017 – Childminding Association Conference, Northampton

23<sup>rd</sup> September 2017 – Mia Fest, Little Horwood, Milton Keynes

30<sup>th</sup> September 2017 – Childcare Expo, Coventry

2<sup>nd</sup> October 2017 – INTU Milton Keynes, launch of 'Autism-friendly' shopping hours

6<sup>th</sup> October 2017 – TES Special Education Needs Show, London

### **Reviews:**

"That was absolutely brilliant!! Highly recommend 'Little Meerkat's Big Panic' performed by Collar & Cuffs Co at Brighton Fringe. Lovely story with added sensory play at the end. Big win. T thoroughly enjoyed himself, as did I. Definitely baby and toddler friendly!

***LesBeMums Blog, Brighton Fringe, June 2017***

"Imagine explaining to kids how the brain works. I couldn't either, until I saw (and joined in with) **Little Meerkat's Big Panic**. Based on the book by Jane Evans, this multi-sensory musical performance by **Collar and Cuffs Co** (Ellie Collar and Julia Simmons-Collar) uses storytelling to explain to young children what goes on in their bodies when they get scared, worried or upset; the way various messages travel between different parts of the brain and body.

It's Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) for anxious kids and their anxious adults. With help from toy animals – meerkat, elephant, monkey and snake – and through narration, music and movement, this interactive show teaches basic breathing exercises and other fun techniques for calming down.

It was the smiles and close harmonies that got to me. I mean, when was the last time anyone gave you playdough, bubbles and soft stretchy fabric to play with? It made me miss my babies and miss a whole load of adults who didn't take care of me when I needed them to. Powerful stuff."

***Deborah Caulfield, Disability Arts Online – review from All in the Mind Festival, June 2017***

"I just wanted to say how wonderful I thought your production was yesterday. My 3-year-old loved the songs and is a huge fan of the sensory dough we received. A good story for the children and great tips for parents too...especially a parent who deals with a child he gets a little anxious about noises (my very own little meerkat) going to public toilets with fierce hand dryers is particularly difficult and I regularly need to crouch down and talk him through it and reassure him that it will be okay...your message of saying that if they need hugs or reassurance whilst out and about is okay and the right thing to do made me feel good and I will continue to guide my little meerkat through these experiences until he finds his calm and can eventually deal with these situations without fear...thank you."

***Parent email following Festival of Giants, July 2017***

"I just wanted to thank you for your wonderful Little Meerkat show at the MK Festival of Giants yesterday. My daughters age 5 and 11 thoroughly enjoyed it and we took away something quite special with us.



Our eldest has Asperger's and has always struggled with sensory issues. She is a strong and capable little girl who for the most part you would never guess the inner fight she has every single day with anxiety. She still has major melt downs and sometimes we find it hard to help her. She loved your show SO much and also the dough handed out after she whispered to me "This could be about me mummy" whilst watching and on the way home hugged me and her dad more than usual. Her little sister also found it very useful and inclusive - I suppose it made us all feel quite ok about feeling anxious and that everyone has their own personal struggles and problems when sometimes you feel quite alone and no one gets it. The girls have asked me to buy some of the stretchy fabric too! We didn't expect to find so much in a show which was relevant to us as a family- thanks again!"

***Parent email following Festival of Giants, July 2017***

### **Technical Requirements**

The production can be completely self-contained, which means it's suitable for performance virtually anywhere, but if there is a plug socket available then the performance will include the use of scented smoke in two short bursts about ten minutes apart.

The floor cloth is approx. 3m x 3m, and the step ladder used is 8ft; gazebo shown below is not part of set. We provide a range of cushions and rugs for children to sit on, but some chairs or other seating is useful to support adults with mobility problems or breastfeeding mothers.

We prefer to work in natural daylight wherever possible, and we are very happy to perform in café or other dual-use spaces.







### **About Collar & Cuffs Co**

Collar & Cuffs Co was established in April 2016 by consultant youth arts worker, Julia Collar. After 15 years working with young people with complex needs and developmental trauma alongside producing and performing in professional touring work for other companies, Julia decided to set up her own company.

Her first production, Britpop musical 'The Girl From Mars', received Arts Council Funding, an award from Brighton Fringe, and embarked on a national tour culminating in a full show at the massive Shiiine On Weekender in November 2016.

Following needs identified by children and their grown-ups whilst touring 'Little Meerkat's Big Panic', Julia has crowdfunded £500 to develop a new piece of multi-sensory theatre for 0-7s exploring anger. This production will use waterplay and seaside sensory experiences and will be available from December 2017.

She is mum to four-year-old twins, one of whom has a hearing impairment and the other Asperger's.





**Collar & Cuffs Co**  
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