

# CLEAN BREAK

## PRESS RELEASE

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### KEIR STARMER VISITS CLEAN BREAK TO CELEBRATE AS THE THEATRE COMPANY REOPENS ITS DOORS TO MEMBERS

Today, Keir Starmer, Leader of the Labour Party and local MP for Holborn & St Pancras, visited charity Clean Break as the theatre company reopened its building to its Members (women who have experience or are on the fringes of the criminal justice system). During his visit, Keir observed a group of Members filming *Sweatbox*, a play whose nationwide tour was cancelled due to the pandemic.

Located in Keir's Holborn and St Pancras constituency, Clean Break's building is a vital centre for support, connection and creativity for the vulnerable women with whom it engages, and the company has strived to return some of its theatre and health and wellbeing offers onsite in a socially distanced manner.

To accommodate its reopening, the building is cleaned throughout the day, a one-way system has been implemented, with a 2-metres distancing rule in place. Only a quarter of staff is allowed on site and the number of Members is reduced.

As well as providing a new programme of socially distanced workshops for Members onsite, there is continuing online engagement with those unable to attend in person. Clean Break continues to ensure that its Members have access to computers and ways of accessing the internet.

As a theatre company, Clean Break and its audiences are suffering from the closure of theatres. The company is trying to find ways to provide employment for some of the freelance women theatre artists who are at the heart of their work and make up 70% of our industry.

**Keir Starmer:** *"It is great to be at Clean Break to see them welcome back their Members."*

*"Much of the focus on the arts during this pandemic has rightly been on the huge financial challenges facing the sector. It's also important to remember the huge impact that this period has had on people's wellbeing, and I know that Clean Break and other theatre companies have been very eager to get started again."*

*"I am very glad that Clean Break have been able to re-open safely so they can continue with their important work."*

**Clean Break Member:** *"It's been more than 6 months since lockdown and I was very worried that maybe I wouldn't be able to go out again... but today when I came back to Clean Break I kind of felt like, oh yeah I can do this. It's given me hope."*

**Róisín McBrinn and Anna Herrmann, Joint Artistic Directors:** *"Lockdown has been particularly trying for our Members, many of whom have been impacted by the negative effects of poor mental health,*

*isolation, impoverishment and a lack of access to technology. Our priority has been to respond to our Members' needs, with care packages, weekly phone calls, and online theatre programmes. But they deeply missed the lifeline that Clean Break provides. It is so important to us all to be back in the building together and we are thrilled Keir could join us at this time."*

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

**Clean Break** changes lives and changes minds through theatre – on stage, in prison and in the community. It produces ground-breaking plays with women's voices at the heart of its work. Founded in 1979 by two women prisoners who believed that theatre could bring the hidden stories of imprisoned women to a wider audience, it remains true to these roots; inspiring playwrights and captivating audiences with the company's award-winning plays on the complex theme of women and crime.

Its commissioned playwrights have included Alice Birch, Deborah Bruce, Lin Coghlan, E V Crowe, Vivienne Franzmann, Tanika Gupta, Katie Hims, Sam Holcroft, Theresa Ikoko, Lucy Kirkwood, Chloë Moss, Rebecca Lenkiewicz, Winsome Pinnock and Rebecca Prichard.

Since closing its building in March due to the Covid-19 crisis, Clean Break has been working to ensure that its community remains vital, including: commissioning *2 Metres Apart* – 12 socially distanced collaborations between its artist community and its member artists; launching *Write 2 Connect*, a letter writing project connecting women in prison with women in the community; and offering an online artistic programme to provide a creative space for women with experience of the criminal justice system. The company's 2020 productions have also included: *Inside This Box* by Yasmin Joseph, performed by Clean Break Young Artists at Arcola and Omnibus; *Not Pretty Like The Rainbow*, by Clean Break member Daisy King, performed by Clean Break Members in a range of settings; and *Sweatbox* by Chloë Moss' touring in a prison van.

Clean Break celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2019. Highlights included: *Inside Bitch*, conceived by Stacey Gregg and Deborah Pearson, devised by Lucy Edkins, Jennifer Joseph, TerriAnn Oudjar and Jade Small, at the Royal Court Theatre; Alice Birch's *[BLANK]* by Alice Birch at the Donmar Warehouse; *Belong* by Brazen, Clean Break's Young Artists, at Arcola Disruption Festival and Lyric Hammersmith Evolution Festival; *All The Lights Are On*, the company's first collaboration with Cardboard Citizens; *Sweatbox* by Chloë Moss, touring the UK in a prison van; and a series of events and talks.

***Sweatbox*** by Chloë Moss was originally conceived in 2015 as an intimate production staged in a real prison van, to audiences of 12 at a time. It premiered at Latitude Festival before being presented at theatres, university, and criminal justice settings. The play was revived and toured in 2019. With the 2020 tour cancelled due to the pandemic, Clean Break is adapting the theatre production of *Sweatbox* to a short film produced by Quiet Storm, founders of Create Not Hate.

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