

Summary of Ordinary Extraordinary Festival

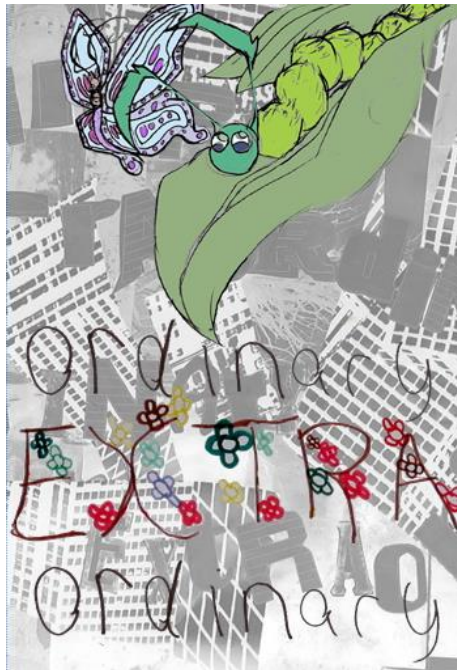
The Ordinary Extraordinary Festival was held on the 25th-26th October 2019 on the Dartington Hall Estate. It followed on from the Ordinary Arts Festival in February 2018, and was produced by the Branchline partnership of arts and social care organisations, who all contributed to the content or supported the Young Creatives to do so. The Young Creatives team are learning disabled teenagers and young adults. Lifeworks was the lead organisation who handled finances and overall production of the activities.

It's the power of people coming together to tell it like it is that really changes things. It's a wonderful group of people coming together really art to express themselves. It's so creative and genuinely the most heart-warming place to be in Totnes today.

Sarah Wollaston MP

From a disabled point of view, I think it's really difficult to get people to build their confidence. Because a lot of disabled people – learning disabled, physically disabled, whatever, find difficulty in thinking that they are awesome. That's how it is – they are awesome, just like everybody else. And this sort of festival shows people that they can make a difference, that they can do what they want to do, and people will still enjoy it.

Ems Coombes, project mentor



Cover and opening page of festival programme

Organisations involved in festival production:

Lifeworks believe in the rights of all individuals with a learning disability, however complex, to receive the services and support they need to develop the skills and confidence to reach their full potential. Existing work includes the provision of residential and short breaks, specialist further education, and numerous community projects with our young people leading the way. Over the course of a year Lifeworks help around 250 people with learning disabilities to have great lives. www.lifeworks-uk.org

Soundart Radio is an independent, non-commercial, licensed community radio station, with original and surprising programmes created by volunteers of all ages. Tune in to 102.5FM in the Totnes area or online at www.soundartradio.org.uk

Dance in Devon Life is an adventure and we believe dance is the only way to ride. As a charity for happier and healthier communities, we're here for each other every hop, skip and step of the way. www.danceindevon.org.uk

Daisi is a not-for-profit arts education organisation offering young people hands-on artistic experiences. We work with over 6,000 children and 100 artists annually, in schools and in non-formal settings www.daisi.org.uk

Play Torbay is a charity with the aim to improve the quality and quantity of play provision for children and young people living in Torbay and raise awareness about the importance of play in children's lives. <http://playtorbay.org.uk>

SPLASH is a high quality, inclusive holiday play scheme for young people (5-19 years) with severe to profound physical and learning disabilities. Find us on Facebook www.facebook.com/Splashdevon

The Turning Tides Project believes that everyone has the right to equal access to music, the arts and life. We intend to make this right a reality for people with 'learning disability' or 'autism' labels in Devon. www.theturningtidesproject.org.uk

Jamming Station is a hub where artists can connect and grow creatively through crafting ideas, making music and performing. Exciting projects support young people to strengthen their voice and expression. www.jammingstation.co.uk

Doorstep Arts is a non-profit arts education organisation based in Torbay. We run 14 drama groups across Torbay at youth clubs, church halls and schools. www.doorsteparts.co.uk

Far Flung Dance Theatre is a professional integrated dance theatre company based in Plymouth. The company is a collective of disabled and non-disabled dancers, actors, musicians, makers and performers. www.farflungdancetheatre.co.uk

Theatre Royal Plymouth has over 60 inspiring and engaging projects for people of all ages and walks of life to get involved. We partner with diverse communities who might not usually feel that theatre is for them.

Funky Llama, based at Theatre Royal Plymouth, is a platform for adults with different abilities to actively participate in the creation and delivery of a programme of activities and professional inclusive arts events. <https://theatreroyal.com>

biggerhouse Film make award winning dramas, documentaries and animation films. In all our films we put the participants at the centre of the devising and production process. We make films 'with' people not 'about' them. www.biggerhousefilm.co.uk

Encounters Arts is a company of artists, producers, facilitators and change agents. We are creating the conditions for a creative, caring, connected world in which all can learn to flourish. www.encounters-arts.org.uk

Parkour Experiences brings the art of Parkour to our community, by teaching the basics of the sport in a safe and controlled manner and by enforcing the philosophy of Parkour. www.parkourexperiences.co.uk

Hooperlative Health and fitness is a south Devon based group exercise instructor and Personal Trainer, with a passion for making exercise fun. www.facebook.com/hooperlativehealthandfitness

Evaluation Methodology

Soundart Radio led evaluation for the festival and collected feedback from audience, participants, artists and Lifeworks staff throughout the creative development from the Summer holiday sessions onwards; during the festival itself and afterwards. The table below demonstrates the various methods implemented during the event:

What	Where	Theme	Sample questions	Materials used
Postcards	All main activity spaces, including seminar	General feedback	"Tell us about your experience"	Postcards; postboxes of some kind
Jam jars and buttons	Cafe and space reception	Wellbeing related statements to agree with by popping a button in the relevant jar	"I connected with someone new" "I worked with a team" "I had fun" "I learned something new"	Jam jars; buttons; labels
Wishing Tree	Cafe and space reception	Future/wishes	"Tell us your wishes for the future"; "tell us what the next festival could be like"	Really big branch in a sturdy pot; lengths of cotton rag to write or draw wishes on and tie onto tree
Interviews; sound recording	Soundart studio and out and about	Case studies; vox pops	"Tell us about your experience"; On air discussions	Tascams; studio
Conversations with young people, parents, artists etc.	Whole festival site	General feedback and case studies	Open conversation	All to make notes where possible, as soon after conversations have taken place as possible.

Additionally, they conducted a number of interviews with both young creatives and facilitators in the run up to the event, and soon afterwards, using the Warwick and Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale as well as wider, in depth conversations about the creative process and the experience of participants.

Young People's Participation and Journey

Many people commented on how important the process of creating a performance was. The young people loved to do this, and it was a big step up from the previous festival.

I was in the world during the volcano...The caterpillar turned into a butterfly – I think it's something the kids will really like.

People feel trapped in themselves, but like a caterpillar in a cocoon, they are thinking who they are, who they want to be. But when they are ready, they transform into a butterfly, colourful, beautiful, outstanding. Brioney

Throughout the process, the Young Creatives were shown statements from the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, and asked to respond on a scale of 1-5 where 1 means none of the time and 5 means all of the time. The average scores are shown here:

I've been feeling useful	3.5
I've been feeling relaxed	5
I've been feeling interested in other people	3
I've had energy to spare	4
I've been dealing with problems well	3
I've been thinking clearly	5
I've been feeling good about myself	4
I've been feeling close to other people	5
I've been feeling confident	4
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	5
I've been feeling loved	5
I've been interested in new things	5
I've been feeling cheerful	5

The improved areas include ability to manage problems; and more interest in other people. Areas that were more difficult include managing their energy and feeling relaxed, as for some young people, the activities were hard work and set within long days. Some felt overwhelmed at the festival by "all the stuff going on", and the lack of a quiet space. However overall they were positive about the impact on wellbeing.

It makes me feel calm. We love everything about this. Lauren

Helps us to know how it can feel to recognise the signs of lonely. Damon

They also talked about the value it brought to their skills and opportunities, and how they plan to pass their skills on to others.

It's good for my CV after I work with people with disabilities and help me get a job. And it can be fun. Ewan

I can help people with disabilities learn to write and with spelling. Some of them haven't done an Arts Award before. Lucy

We also asked the artists and staff involved in the process about the benefits they had observed for the participants in creating a festival together. The comments were extremely positive and demonstrated that a shared artistic process such as this can garner great returns for the mental health of those involved:

Everything that's happening is happening because they have identified what they want to do. Some changes we have seen in the young people are that they have really gelled as a group. Jam Buddies grew out of seeing that young people really want to be involved, not just watch performers on the stage. This year there has been development time to make sure that happened, and built common ground through weekly rehearsals. Young people have got to know each and support each other. Rachel Thame, Turning Tides.

It's terrific to see the artistic side of them coming out. You can see how it was at the beginning, and how they've come out of their shells over time. With Lifeworks we're very fortunate because we facilitate them to develop things, everybody is not just academic, everybody is good at something and if you give them the equipment to do things they excel in, then they come around. Janie Glynn-Chivers, Lifeworks



Artists' and Organisations' Experience

Branchline has been an evolving partnership over the last few years. The experience of producing this event and others raises questions the group could consider next, including:

- Should Lifeworks always be lead organisation, or could this be more shared?
- How do we best exploit artists skills and divide our time between management, admin etc. as well as production?
- What is the role of additional organisations and freelance artists who are brought in, and how do we map these within the partnership?
- How do we collaborate effectively, without additional funding for partnership meetings and development?

A significant development was the decision taken, early in the creative process, that the music, dance and theatre strands would work together on one performance. Conversations with both the arts leaders and the Young Creatives showed everyone felt positive about this, and that it enabled the Young Creatives to develop one key element of the festival - the Caterpillar performance - that was a rich, meaningful and high-quality experience for both performers and audiences.

We started off with introducing people to the instruments and the space, and explore... once they became familiar people created music based on the story, like following a graphic score to reflect what's happening. It's been led by the people in the sessions. It worked better when we all used what each other were doing. It was nice to watch the dance stuff and see how that's come together and grown. Abi Innocent, Turning Tides

You could see that everybody involved in that both watching and performing and being part of the story was getting something out of it. It works at that emotional level to draw out our own stories so a bit of experience can come forward so we can offer new things in the future.

Jacqi Hodgson, Mayor of Totnes

They are getting more excited and now we are at the moment... we have mainly the same groups of students, but sometimes there are other groups - that's been difficult, but not as bad as I thought it would be. Some will just do as you say, and don't put in any input. But some do, and that's really nice to see, such as different ways to make the sea. Ems Coombes, project mentor

Working in large groups really makes you consider your own practice. We have a true social model approach; not every company does that and we do a lot of reflection in action as we work. This process means you find respectful ways to work together while retaining your own autonomy.

Rachel de Thame, Turning Tides

I think it's important for everybody to have opportunities to make art, try new things they haven't necessarily done and to have their moment on the stage. I hope that by working on something together and making something they are proud of it will increase confidence. Rebecca, dance artist

As well as arts activities, the festival included fringe workshops and arts activities, and a café run by Young Creatives working with 'The Kitchen Table'.

One of my missions when I moved to Totnes was to do enabling work so that young people who are living in supported living have the confidence to cook for themselves and eat healthily rather than living on microwave meals. Sima Cutting, The Kitchen Table

Audience Experience

The event faced some issues typical with scheduling an event in October. Heavy rain kept some people away, and also meant that outdoor signage wilted, and getting around the festival site was not always easy. Onsite transport was provided by an electric buggy with volunteer drivers, with a phone number in the festival programme. This was found to be very helpful.

The weather is absolutely dreadful, because of that the turnout is quite low. Ems Coombes

The festival was billed as inclusive, and this message had some effect, with the audience a mix of people with and without disabilities. Venues could have done more to be accessible to all, for example boy who uses a wheelchair and his father were not immediately able to access the Great Hall, and a technician had to be found to access the small lift at the back of the building. Disabled parking spaces at Space studios were sometimes taken up with facilitators vehicles rather than kept free for audience members. However, audiences on the whole were positive about inclusion:

Lots of festivals are not at all inclusive and make no attempt to think about things you would need to think about to include everyone. Audience member

I'm not sure there are many events like this anywhere. There are not many things that people feel comfortable or welcome going to, so this is just brilliant in terms of linking people up together. Parent of Young Creative

I don't know how many festivals happen like this but it feels like it's quite unique and it's a great experience for everyone that takes part. Audience member

The festival, especially the caterpillar performance, was popular with families with young children, and this could be a good audience segment to develop in the future. Young Creatives would like to attract more young people their own age outside of their circles, such as young people who don't have learning disabilities. Different types of events may be needed to reach them, such as partnering with other youth organisations who reach different demographics.

Feedback was gathered from audiences, using sound recording in foyers, café etc., and at the end of the performances and the seminar. At the seminar, some commented that they were not sure where the results of the consultation activities would be disseminated, and that there was a lack of time to network.

Audience feedback: seminar

I was looking around, thinking I wonder if anybody here is on the autistic spectrum, because actually people like that with learning difficulties, disabilities, it would have been good to have heard from them as well.
Julie Best-Clark

It's wonderful in life to go into different environments, and meet new people with different experiences and perspectives... it's made me think about a few aspects of what we do, particularly about how we link with community, one of the questions we were asking ourselves is how do we come together as a community, though we haven't come up with the answers, there are lots of potential. I will continue to ponder some of those questions.
Dr Kate Lovett

The three speakers at the beginning had been brought back into play once the workshop feedback had been garnered would have been a good idea and if they had been involved more proactively in a group situation might have been more useful Seminar attendee

Audience feedback: caterpillar performance:

It really struck me that at the end the mayor asked people to shout out one word. Someone said pretty and their faces lit up, you could see that they wanted someone to say it all looked pretty, and to get that validation. I could really see the joy that they all experienced. Little things mean a lot to them, which sadly many other people miss all the small things. Julie Best-Clark

It was wonderful, very nicely put together, the whole involvement of everybody. We heard about it from friends, and my daughter likes to be involved in these sorts of things. Father of young child

It was a lot of fun to watch, full of truth, emotion and I loved the creativity, there were so many ideas and so much hard work, time commitment, energy, everyone knew what they were doing. And how much the people themselves were enjoying performing. Everyone loved performing and the audience loved watching it. Brian Harty, Lifeworks CEO

I thought it was wonderful and they all did it in their own way. At the end he said 'I'm so happy!' I said to his mum he enjoyed it so much we ought to get a sheet and a light and do it at home! Lifeworks parent

It was visually stunning, everyone looked really confident. Excellent. Audience member

Audience feedback: animation

It was fantastic it must have taken a month of Sundays to create movement like that!

I thought it was an excellent first film. Very funny; I really enjoyed it and I'm sure they'll go on to do more and more. Projectionist



Recommendations for Development

Where do we take this next? As an example, you watch a show like that and you want it to be taken out of just this festival, it deserves a bigger platform somehow. I don't know how we do that at the moment. Brian Harty, CEO of Lifeworks

This was the second iteration of this festival, the first being 'Ordinary Arts' in February 2018. The titles are intended to convey society's perceptions of learning-disabled people, and how they respond to this. For example, the pull between feeling you are just 'normal' like everyone else, or that you are 'special' and your disability is a super power. Young Creatives want to be accepted and integrated into all areas of society, but achieve recognition for the innovative ideas and perspectives they can bring to this.

However, the title was problematic for some

I've struggled with the concept of Ordinary Extraordinary - I don't think anything is ordinary, there is extraordinary in everything. Abi Innocent, Turning Tides

Also, some very similar titles are being used by other events, so it may be good to review this for the future.

Based on the research carried out throughout the festival production process, there are a number of recommendations for Branchline to consider for the future.

- For an event of this scale we need to enlist one, experienced artistic director, working closely with one, experienced festival producer who together oversee the curation and production. A producer would solve concerns that were raised by artists and organisations about practicalities such as communication between organisations; efficiency of how artists' time was used; volunteer management; marketing; communication with venue; etc. An artistic director with expertise in disability/outsider arts could help the Young Creatives to shape up a really bold and distinctive event that communicates their ideas and shifts audience perceptions.
- The Branchline team should decide if projects are initially audience led or Young Creative led, and work from this standpoint. If the priority is the participants learning and experience, then it is fine to perform to smaller audiences, largely made up of family and friends. If we want to attract and include large audiences, we need to begin with research about what they need, and tailor activities to that. For example, if events are aimed at young audiences, would it be preferable to programme some activities during school hours, and invite school groups in. Or if families or groups need transport arranging, this could be planned early in the process. One audience segment who enjoyed this year's event was families with young children (2-7yr olds), so this could be a good direction for future performances. An example of an inclusive theatre company who regularly create professional work for such audiences is <https://www.chickenshed.org.uk/>. Another audience segment the Young Creatives would like to cater for is other people in their age group, who could be reached by co-producing with other youth organisations, or holding events

with a mainstream feel in town centres, such as DJ nights with less emphasis in marketing on disability and inclusion (which can alienate some audiences).

- There could be one big annual festival, or a series of smaller events throughout the year. In either case, performance development could be spread out, with events to showcase work that has been made more gradually. This could relieve pressure on Young Creatives, and engage them year-round in activities. Continued involvement in the arts can support life skills, such as hand eye coordination through design and prop making; and communication skills through singing and broadcasting. This could have more impact if it is to be a more regular part of their lives.
- In one scenario, the seminar could break away from the performance event, for example if it took place two or three months later, festival reports and films could be presented there. In another, talks and discussions could be woven into an event programme, with less separation from artistic work. In either model, it is important to move to a learning-disabled led seminar, and to put in place what is needed to empower their voices first in the debate about their lives. Other organisations are leading the way in this - a case study for a symposium where all speakers were learning disabled is: <https://stayupdate.org/the-unordinary-conference/> This approach would be truer to Branchline's aim for learning disabled people to take a lead.
- More resources may be needed to ensure all kinds of audiences feel welcomed and catered for, such as ramps; sign language interpreters; quiet or sensory spaces; additional stewards and volunteers; transport and accessible parking.
- Completed performances and short films could be taken out to other events and festivals to reach new audiences.
- If people in influential positions, such as MPs, attend seminars or performances, the opportunity must be taken to raise policy issues, and ask them for specific actions.
- Branchline partner organisations and the Young Creatives should review other projects that are happening around the UK and beyond, and seek development funding to visit them and learn from best practice.

