

Ledbury Poetry Festival – Outside Festival Time

- Who we are – Ledbury Poetry Festival’s core remit is to organise an annual ten day summer Festival, usually in July, with between 60 to 80 events.

The Festival has a number of additional or extension activities that run all year round, including the Ledbury Poetry Competition, the Ledbury Forte Poetry Prize for Second Collections, the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics programme, Voice Coaching residencies for poets, and sizeable school and community programmes.

- Why we did what we did – A description of the extension work

Ledbury Poetry Festival’s mission is, “To enable everyone to enjoy poetry, and to develop and nurture the creative use of language”.

Although we work extremely hard to promote the Festival, to welcome high profile and famous people to widen the appeal, the fact is that many people are put off by the idea of poetry. We make sure there are numerous Free events and any number of initiatives to attract as broad an audience as possible and remove barriers to participation. However we recognise that the best way to reach people who might, for whatever reason, never attend a festival event, is to take poetry into schools and community settings.

In addition to the schools and community work being a way to ensure that people who might never attend a festival event can enjoy and experience poetry, it makes sense to use the Festival as a platform and a showcase opportunity. While many organisations might be able to undertake community projects, the Festival is more unique in that it is a natural showcase opportunity for poems that can be created and performed by children and adults alike.

More recently the festival has recognised that it can use its high profile to enable positive change within the wider poetry sector and this has prompted a number of the other initiatives mentioned – the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics, the Ledbury Forte Poetry Prize for Second Collections, Voice Coaching.

- What we did

Key elements of the work we do with **schools**:

Working with the best poets in the UK (proud to have worked with poets including Raymond Antrobus, Hollie McNish, Inua Ellams, Jacob Sam La Rose, Val Bloom and many more) and trying to find the best poets to match each project or school.

Children writing and creating their own poems led by poets

Performance opportunities – either at the festival or using other (for example digital) formats

Lots of different projects – from sending poets into schools for a day or as a poet in residence across weeks or a whole year. Bespoke projects in response to requests from schools. Projects that tie in with particular subject areas – such as forest school – or themes, such as poetry and the holocaust, or ‘colourful cultures’. The programme is defined by flexibility and responsiveness. We also run inset sessions and teacher training conference sessions – to get teachers writing. Idea being that if teachers write poetry themselves that will help them be more confident about teaching writing and reading poetry. Examples include:

Poetry and Song project

This project ran over three years and took different themes each time – (Rivers, WW1, Dream Catcher (inspired by Elgar’s Dream of Gerontius). The pupils wrote the poems and crafted them into songs, which they then performed at the Festival.

Festival in a Day event

Schools gather in a venue – hear three poets perform, take part in three different workshops – write lots of first drafts of poems – bring these back to a showcase when pupils perform their poems to each other.

Poetry Trail

This is a popular project with schools because it combines a writing element and a digital element. Pupils write poems on location to create a trail round their local area. Back in school they make films of their poems. Then each film is uploaded to a website and has its own QR code, which is placed in the location that inspired the poem.

Key elements of the extension work in the **community**:

Work with **targeted groups**: largely defined by ACE protected characteristics, but also including rural poor, isolated and excluded groups

Work in **targeted areas**: geographical areas in bottom 20% of IMD, or in a central location serving those areas.

Examples include: Free drop-in sessions *Poetry and Pictures* at Herefordshire Mind; *Segments* in Ledbury. Closed group sessions with more vulnerable groups: *Mappa Ledbury* large scale community art and poetry in 13 residential care settings. Sessions also occurring with *Herefordshire Young Carers*, *NHS Chronic Pain Clinic*, *SHYPP* (now called *Citizen*) and *Close House*.

- How we did it, including how we made the choices

Schools: Responsiveness – responding to requests from schools, responding to partnership and collaborative opportunities from other organisations, responding to initiatives such as Arts Award. Equally if a poet is booked to appear at the Festival – we look at how to use them in schools. The scheme is about flexibility, grabbing opportunities, responding to demand, tailoring opportunities to individual schools.

Community: Targeted groups and areas, responding to need, seizing initiatives

- What difference it made to the people who took part, and your organisation. Examples might include strategy and/or governance changes.

“The power of the day was very evident in the way all children responded. Our year group contains a number of rather challenging children, but very little was needed by our staff to maintain the very high standards of behaviour, energy and engagement that the children continued throughout the day. Even reluctant writers joined in with every activity and produced work that both we and they are truly proud of.”

Example of a poem from “She writes poetry on her arms” youth project (the title is an allusion to endemic self-harm and body image problems in young women). These young women and their poetry were showcased at Women of the World Festival in Chester

Bad Neighbourhood

her body grew up around her like a bad neighbourhood
her dress is too short for her but it's for the neighbourhood
the shoes are too big for her but it's for the neighbourhood
the makeup is too much for her but it's for the neighbourhood

it's what the neighbourhood wants, what they like
not what you feel comfortable in
comfort is not the key

The key is what you wear - it's what they want to see
what's underneath and how you can take it until you scream
how much further?
how much longer?
they don't want to see it all

We think that the Arts Council's sustained support for LPF as a RFO and now an NPO is substantially because of the organisation's sustained and genuine commitment to these extension activities. They are not a bolt on or a box ticking exercise for LPF, they are absolutely at the heart of what we do and this has made the organisation very attractive to the Arts Council and meant we have achieved sustained and long-term Arts Council funding.

Organisational ethos - I would say that it has kept the Festival very much in touch with and focused on our local communities, on working in partnership with schools and other organisations to make the work happen. We are also always thinking about how to ensure the Festival events do not just happen within the four walls of traditional venues, but on the streets and in different and unusual settings. Our work in community settings and schools means that we have good partnerships with practitioners who can carry out these events and we are good at looking at different ways to engage people with poetry, even those who actively don't want to engage! In the case of some of our festival events, we have to set aside much more time and resources to facilitate and enable vulnerable groups to perform – examples include transport and refreshment budgets for young people travelling from Hereford, support workers, blocked out time in the busy festival schedule for rehearsal practice. There is a lot of cross-fertilisation between all our activities.