The Just Festival Board chose the theme "Transitions" for the 2019 festival. It engaged new and returning audiences in reflecting on vital social justice issues.

Our conversations and talks were closely linked to this theme. We again celebrated the festival in St John’s Church, using the Church and Chapel. As our experiment in 2018 in offering free entry to the Conversation programme had been so successful, enabling more people to share events, we retained this policy in 2019. This decision was again highly successful, with many conversations reaching the maximum capacity of the Chapel, and some having to be held in the Church. The topics offered plenty of choice, from “Translating: the joys and challenges”, “Dancing into Retirement”, “Into Recovery”, “Breaking the Cycle”, “Ending Slavery”, “Towards the Bionic Human”, “Lives in Transition”, "Cherished and Challenged" and “From Syria to Scotland”. The panels consisted of an impressive list of accomplished academics as well as faith and community leaders, such as Prof Kenneth Boyd, Bishop John Armes, Rev Kirrilee Reid, Tom Lea, Maxwell Rea, Prof Mary Marshall, The Very Rev Dr Derek Browning, Jeremy Balfour MSP, Dr Line Kikkenborg Christensen, The Very Revd Dr Andrew McLellan and Viv Dickenson.

Just again partnered with local charities to present a selection of engaging talks on death and dying with Good Life, Good Death and Good Grief - “Will Facebook be your Funeral Director?”, "Fun at the End" and “The CSI Effect”, as well as discussions on death in a more informal context - Death Cafes hosted by the Marie Curie Hospice.

The theme Transitions was closely followed in our choice of theatre productions. These included "So you say you come from?" by the Asylum Project at Strathclyde University Law School and "Where are you really from?" by the World Spirit Theatre. These both explored identity, culture, how easy it is to become stateless in a hostile environment; the issues of obtaining identity documents
AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

PERFORMANCES: IMPACT

"Fantastic Show - a great voice and a poignant script" (Being Liza)

"Very moving - a reminder of how fragile 'home;' can be" and "Showed how easy it is to slide into homelessness and how devastating it can be" (Home)

"This event opened my eyes to the issues that refugees have to deal with after being relocated to a new country" and "The various layers within the asylum system which make it a lottery" (So you say you come from?)

"I have a better idea of the challenges facing refugees" and "Very thought-provoking about helping refugees - useful points about organisations trying to help" (Where are you really from?)

and navigating a complex immigration system. "Being Liza" by Interabang Productions UK, was a new musical play about a girl trying to understand who she really is behind the face of the icon she has represented for years, and how to break free from the constricting expectations of family and fans. "Home" by Active Inquiry UK, was funded by the Corra Foundation, and the result of cooperation with 3 local community groups. They staged 3 short plays on aspects of the insecurity of homes and homelessness. Their four performances received 4* and 5* reviews, attracted 105 attendees, and were very thought-provoking.

The Just Festival also included a major exhibition in the church. "Abraham: Out of One, Many” was an artistic exploration of living harmoniously, inspired by Abraham, the common ancestor of three faiths. It was created by three Middle Eastern artists, one Muslim, one Christian and one Jewish. This was curated by CARAVAN, an NGO using the arts to build bridges between the creeds and cultures of the Middle East and the West. The opening of this exhibition was used as the launch event for the festival: it produced amazingly strong and positive feedback. We also promoted the CrossReach exhibition, showing a few works to mark that organisation’s 150th anniversary. The two exhibitions were seen by 12,570 visitors.

The Festival programme attracted over 2,750 attendees, excluding all who came to the exhibitions. We welcomed predominantly local Edinburgh audiences; we also attracted visitors from across the UK as well as Europe, USA, Canada, Chile and Australia. On the basis of returned feedback forms, we can identify that our programme mostly appealed to women (74%) and attendees in their
mid-50s and late 60s (24% and 15% respectively). Our audiences found the programme events very good (63%) or good (31%). 90% of our audiences would recommend the Festival programme to their friends and family.

Just Festival is deeply indebted to St John's for enabling the delivery of the festival, and to its sponsors: the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Together Churches, the Scottish Government/ Voluntary Action Fund, the Corra Foundation, and to foundations and individuals who donated generously.

PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

Just Festival offers a platform for marginalised voices to be heard and represented in public discourse. We recognise a need for a collective approach towards tackling inequalities and promoting diversity through arts and open dialogue. Having observed how the community landscape of Edinburgh and Scotland has changed in the past 19 years, we have revisited our ways of engaging with communities and remoulded our programming activities.

We aim to continue working with disadvantaged groups and individuals and to provide them with skills and support in ensuring their stories are told.

Co-financed by the Corra Foundation, the ‘Age & Stage’ Project engaged elderly people and their carers who experience loneliness and isolation. Active Inquiry, who specialise in producing devised plays, delivered drama workshops and guided project participants in telling and sharing their stories. The drama workshops participants found the experience of attending the drama sessions 'excellent' (100%). They all felt they had received adequate support from the project team. One of the participants said ‘everyone involved in the project was understanding, caring and supportive’. When asked about what they most enjoyed, the participants mentioned: ‘performing’, ‘the improvisation and no written script to learn’, ‘the coming together’, ‘a different way of working’, ‘the feeling of being challenged and excited’.

AUDDIENCE FEEDBACK

CONVERSATIONS: IMPACT

‘Helped me better understand people who are addicted to substances and the struggles that lead to such places and the importance of a supportive, understanding community - so important for people to talk openly and connect with others.’
(Into Recovery)

‘Increased awareness left me with many questions. Updated my knowledge of current medical practices.’
(Towards a Bionic Human)

‘It was great firstly just to have a space to talk about it openly - we never do! Particularly useful to think about the possible impact of a gender-neutral society.’
(Transitoning: the Joys and the Challenges)

‘It identified the problem and the solution. Very thought-provoking - opened my eyes and changed my views.’
(Breaking the Cycle)
PROJECT IMPACT

AGE AND STAGE
Katie Quinn, Connecting Craigmillar

‘Seven people from the local community (and of a range of age groups) have consistently attended the weekly drama workshops around the theme of ‘Isolation’. It’s good to see that the themes, story and character development of the piece are led by the members of the community, and I’ve had conversations with some members of the group outside the workshops, and their feedback about their experience has been really positive.’

Through our technical and employability skills project aimed at young unemployed people, ‘Staged for Life’, we delivered an intensive two-week course for 8 participants in July 2019. In addition, we provided work placement opportunities for all 8 participants who completed the course. Feedback collated throughout the project delivery has proved that the project has increased participants’ confidence in operating sound and lighting equipment, applying for jobs in the industry, their ability to work as part of a team as well as to communicate successfully. It also increased their knowledge of the arts and entertainment industry in Edinburgh.

Our events attract volunteers from Edinburgh and beyond who want to enhance their customer services, communications, technical and management skills. In 2019 we recruited 13, from Scotland, England, Bulgaria, USA, Lithuania and Spain, and also 6 Edinburgh-based Syrian refugees. The majority were young unemployed people or students. When asked about their reasons for volunteering, they mentioned improving their English language skills, meeting new people, working with a Festival focused on social issues and theatre, as well as getting to know the Edinburgh Festival environment better. The majority of volunteers agreed that the festival had enhanced their personal confidence and working confidence. The majority of volunteers agreed that they had gained better knowledge when it comes to social justice issues, as well as gaining a greater sense of responsibility and confidence to engage with social justice issues. Again, the majority of volunteers said they had met new friends and established valuable connections. As a result of participating in the festival volunteering programme, our volunteers directly interacted with 439 audience members attending the Just Festival events, over 50 conversation speakers and performers, as well as hundreds of visitors to the St John’s Church and passers-by while flyering for the Just Festival events.

Finally, we delivered 4 drop-in sessions for a total of 54 participants. Some were co-hosted with Edinburgh Festival Fringe and Edinburgh College.

We continue to look for new partners and supporters who can join us and help make our communities just for all.