



## **Audacious Women Festival 18-26 February 2017**



### **Concept**

The Audacious Women Festival aims to break down personal, political and institutional barriers, celebrating audacious women everywhere. This is more than a women's festival – it celebrates Audacious Women, encouraging its audience to challenge themselves and to “DO WHAT YOU ALWAYS WISHED YOU DARED”. To be bold and courageous and to break convention.

The events, workshops, performances and conversations the Festival offers range from serious topics where women develop confidence and strategies to deal with difficult challenges and experiences, to learning new skills and discovering their creativity, encountering new cultures and ideas, and memorialising the often hidden history of the audacious women who have gone before us.

We aim to produce a Festival “by women, for women”, managed on a voluntary basis, working with partners to produce a varied and low-cost or free programme. In 2017 we were delighted to work with a range of established and new partners; the Edinburgh Bookshop, Edinburgh libraries and Ocean Terminal were significant partners bringing new events and venues to the AWF. The Scottish Storytelling Centre, Augustine United Church and the City Arts Centre also provided key resources and venues for the events. Grant funding from the Women's Fund and NHS Lothian Mental Health and Wellbeing enabled us to provide free workshops and made key contributions to the success of the AWF. We also welcomed a number of new partners providing one-off events and helping us reach new, more diverse audiences.

The Audacious Women Collective acts as a voluntary organising committee for the festival. The AWC is responsible for the overall programme and agrees content, date, location and pricing of events with partners.

## Overview of Audacious Women Festival 2017

The AWF ran from 18<sup>th</sup> – 26th February 2017 and offered 40 public events over 9 days in 6 streams:

- 3 x Exhibitions
- 13 x Workshops
- 6 x Book events
- 5 x Conversations
- 7 x Performances
- 6 x Sports and other activities



Our overall audience for “booked” events was approximately 700. Over half the events were free entry, with most workshops fully booked. This year we charged for more events in order to test the potential for financial sustainability of the AWF.

In addition to ticket sales, our events were supported from 3 sources:

- Grants from public funds
- Grants and resources (eg free event spaces) from partners
- Donations from audiences and other partners

Audience feedback shows that our free or low-cost approach, relying on the enthusiasm of volunteers from the Audacious Women Collective to organise and staff the events, is appreciated:

*I think it's great that so many things were free or very cheap - great to have an ambitious and accessible programme. Thank you for staging it - it really did enable me to do something I hadn't dared to do before*

*Well organised and amazing that some events were free - it made going to several and asking friends along that bit easier*

## AWF Feedback

Feedback was received from a variety of sources, depending whether the event was organised directly by AWF, or in partnership with another organisation. Evaluations were carried out in two ways:

- Evaluations of some of our own workshops using an evaluation wheel
- An online audience survey

**Workshop evaluations:** positive feedback from workshops indicated that audiences enjoyed the experience and learned something new. The booking system, social media and website were generally regarded as good or satisfactory. Venues varied in quality – for instance, some participants found the open space venue at Ocean Terminal unappealing, but in general met the needs of our participants and workshop leaders.

**Online audience survey:** respondents to the survey were unanimously positive about both the concept of the AWF and individual workshops and events. The AWF clearly met a need for women-only spaces:

*Brilliant! A wonderful, and much needed opportunity for women to connect with themselves and with one another in a supportive environment. Fascinating to see how even mentioning the name of the festival cheered women up. Hopefully this is just the start of a something much bigger and more widespread geographically*

*I always thought I wasn't afraid to try anything, but being given the chance to try something in the absence of patriarchal competition or the male gaze was priceless. Thanks*

*I think it's great and gives a chance for women to have a voice and explore being audacious*

*Thank you for giving the opportunity to attend a safe space to share difficult experiences*

The overall concept of the AWF was well-received with highlights such as:

*[the] sense of community and support at each of the events -- met some great people and felt like a part of something positive and exciting. It was incredibly fun and rewarding!*

*I love the more intimate and lack of corporate/big business feel Thank you for organising such an inspiring event Very uplifting, especially at this time of year*

Some individual events were identified as particularly enjoyable:

*The witches reel. Penny who arranged us was incredible and it was great meeting and singing with other women*

*... enjoyed meeting MSPs at scottish parliament*

*I like that there are taster sessions offered to try new crafts*

## **Audience Reach**

We started to attract attention for the AWF earlier than the previous festival, with a launch event in December 2016 for partners which proved popular. This event offered “taster” performances for the main AWF.

In the AWF itself, our events and workshops covered a range of interests and activities with the aim of providing opportunities for women of all ages from a variety of backgrounds, cultures and abilities. We do not survey our audience or partners on the basis of age, ethnicity, ability etc. but we try to ensure that all our events are accessible to a wide audience in terms of age, ability, interests and cost.



The events we offered in 2017 aimed to extend our audience reach in the following ways:

- The range of age and physical ability attracted to our events is wide. We held two events aimed at a very young audience; several craft workshops sharing traditional female skills (eg knitting) which attracted older women with skills and younger women “trying out” new skills; sports which demand a good level of physical activity (eg break dancing and Roller Derby), attracting younger women as performers and audience, alongside a dance group which celebrates over-60’s dancers.



- Less physically demanding activities were found in our new book stream, singing workshops and conversations, all of which attracted a wide age-range of participants. Audience members facing specific physical challenges participated in these activities.
- The AWF sets out to highlight women’s culture in a multitude of forms and reflecting different backgrounds and cultures. Several workshops and conversations memorialised audacious women who have inspired and encouraged us, including a partnership event at Punjabi Junction and a conversation with a panel of international women.
- The AWF offered a workshop on sexual orientation, run in partnership with LGTB Health and Wellbeing

Audience numbers also demonstrate an aspect of our reach. The total number of bookings for events such as workshops and conversations was approximately 700. Workshops by their nature have restricted numbers and are not difficult to fill, but our larger events also attracted good audience numbers:

- Who do MSPs wish they were? – a mixed open event in Parliament was fully booked with over 40 registering
- Witches Reel: about a 100 women registered for the Women’s Singing Flashmob and attracted a large audience in the Grassmarket!
- Daring to Lead – about 70 women registered for this event with Equate Scotland
- Liz Lockhead on Joan Eardly – provided by the National Gallery of Scotland – was fully booked.
- Audacious Women Festival party – paying audience of about 60 plus guests.
- The final event, Radical Voices, was busy, with an audience drawn both from their regular attendees and through the AWF of approximately 50.

From our audience survey, over 60% of our audience came through word of mouth or contact with partners. Twitter and Facebook attracted almost 20% of our audience. Only 5% of our audience reported that they had discovered the festival through our mailing list, which was built around our audience in 2016, indicating that the 2017 AWF reached a new audience rather than just attracting an established group.

## **Digital Media**

Our digital presence was more sophisticated this year, with a more professional presentation on our website, using Eventbrite for advance bookings. The system was easy to use for our audience, but the website and associated booking system required a high level of input and time resources from the voluntary collective members.

This year we achieved a more consistent use of social media. Facebook and Twitter were widely used to engage our audience before the AWF, and to publicize events as the AWF took place.

The widest electronic audience reach was through Twitter, with over 74,000 impressions between December (when we launched the AWF) and the end of February. Facebook delivered a high level of interactive audience reach, with over 5000 recipients in the week of the AWF, and several peaks of over 4000 in the preceding month. This resulted in approximately 1100 “likes” by the end of the AWF. [O1]

## **Venues**

We continued to use our established venues at the City Arts Centre and the Scottish Story Telling Centre, but created a second “hub” at Augustine United Church for evening events. Ocean Terminal, Meadowbank Stadium, Lauriston Castle, and Punjabi Junction were also used for events provided by partners. The Ocean Terminal venue gave us the opportunity to reach an audience from a different area of the city and offer new events in our programme. However, part of this was an open space area and AWF events for women were adversely impacted by mixed events in the same venue.

## **Funding**

The 2017 AWF started in a more secure financial position with a surplus from the 2016 AWF of approximately £400, and a grant of £1200 from NHS Lothian, which allowed us to develop our website and carry out an earlier marketing campaign. A further grant of £2000 came from the Women’s Fund, and was mainly used to pay for venues and our workshop leaders.

Our long-term aim is for the AWF to be financially self-sustaining, and following our survey in 2016 which indicated that some charges would be acceptable to our audience, we introduced more events with a charge for tickets, whilst maintaining a substantial number of free events run either by partners with public funding or using free venues provided by City of Edinburgh Council.

This mix of grants and income from tickets and other sources proved a successful financial strategy as our accounts show (see appendix 1). Although our feedback clearly indicates that free events are an important feature in the AWF, charges did not prove a deterrent, and provided substantial funds towards further development of the AWF.

With an income of £3810 (excluding grants), and expenditure of £4025, we have almost broken even and made substantial progress towards financial sustainability. We now have sufficient funds in our account to ensure financial security for another AWF. However, the success of the AWF remains heavily reliant on unpaid voluntary work.

## **Media and other coverage**

The AWF received broad coverage from a range of media, with three articles in the Sunday Herald (once on the front page), articles in local publications and three radio broadcasts. Our widest coverage was probably a broadcast on Radio Scotland, but online coverage was also effective, with a series of articles related to the AWF included in the Dangerous Women Project, an article in Common Space and various Blogs.

## **Evaluation**

### **Strengths**

- Audience response clearly shows that the AWF meets a demand for a low-cost women's festival. Audience numbers remain strong, and by using a "waiting list" approach this year we were better able to ensure that free events had a full audience
- We have well-established partnerships with CAC, the Storytelling Centre, Equate Scotland, NGS and the Scottish Parliament, and have supported some upcoming women such as the writers in our book stream
- Our confidence in being able to create and finance a festival is growing. By charging for some events and increasing our sales income, we can see that a sustainable model is emerging for the AWF.
- Our performers, audience and workshop leaders come from a wide range of backgrounds and age-groups, and this year we reached both audience and performers from wider cultural backgrounds.
- The AWF attracted significant media attention, with a front page piece on the Sunday Herald and several radio interviews. The social media reach was over 74,000 for Twitter between the launch and beginning of the AWF.
- We used a wider range of venues this year, enabling us to charge for some events and spread the AWF more widely in Edinburgh.
- We have almost broken even and now have sufficient reserves to undertake another festival without grant funding.

### **Weaknesses**

- Free events experience significant "drop out" of booked participants.
- Grants were still essential as our expenses exceeded our income. We believe a future festival can break even, but may not produce a profit to maintain reserves.
- All organisation and administration is carried out on a voluntary basis by the AWC and it is challenging to find and keep members with both the skills needed to run a festival, and the commitment to the feminist aspirations and ideology that underpins it.

- Although we generally reached appropriate audiences, as NHS Lothian were unable to participate we lost some contacts who were able to reach women from some excluded groups.

## Legacy

We have the following evidence of on-going impact:

The AWF is becoming an established event in the Edinburgh festivals calendar, as our audience is keen to see it as an annual event.



- There is evidence that the AWF introduces women to new experiences, as over 60% of the survey respondents said they had done something new at the AWF. A number of Audacious Acts are recorded on our website – from asking for a pay rise, coming out as a gay woman, and going skinny dipping.
- This year the AWF was able to support a new women entrepreneur through the “Women and Whisky” event, and bring new audiences to our workshop leaders, many of whom run their own businesses.
- Participants in some workshops were eager to keep in touch, and this resulted in a further workshop “Louder and more daring”, on the writing and the spoken word, in May 2017.

## Taking Audacious Women Festival forward

The level of participation from both audience and partners remains good, and the positive feedback encourages us to take the AWF forward. Financially we believe we have a sustainable model, and although we will need to increase the proportion of events where we make a charge, we intend to keep some free events, and offer a low-cost option for many events. Members of the AWC are committed to creating another AWF in 2018, and are creating a new and exciting programme for February 2018. See our website [www.audaciouswomen.scot](http://www.audaciouswomen.scot) for details.