

**DO WHAT YOU ALWAYS
WISH YOU DARED**

**AUDACIOUS
WOMEN**

Review of Audacious Women Festival 22-29 February 2016

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 to "DO WHAT YOU ALWAYS WISH YOU DARED." To be bold and courageous and to break free from convention and limiting expectations.

Partnerships, especially with the Scottish Storytelling Centre, the City Art Centre, and NHS Lothian Mental Health and Wellbeing Team, were key to the success of AWF 2016, providing invaluable resources in terms of venues, funding, contact with performers and workshop leaders, and enhancing the status of AWF events



The fabulous handiwork of our Graffiti Workshop artists

The Audacious Women Collective acts as an 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 2016

The Festival ran from 22nd – 29th February 2016 and offered 20 public events over 9 days in 4 streams:

- ✓ 4 Exhibitions
- ✓ 7 Workshops
- ✓ 3 Conversations
- ✓ 6 Performances and other events

In addition there were a number of closed events, run by voluntary organisations for their service users. They included a firewalk for gypsy traveller women and an event entitled Audaciousness over Austerity.

We estimate the overall audience for “booked” events was over 500. In addition one conversation was live-streamed which approximately doubled its audience. Most events were free entry, all were well attended and workshops fully booked (with 12-19 places). Our final fund-raising event offered women performers the chance to showcase their work, and provided limited funds towards further development of the AWF.

Festival Feedback

Because of the way the festival was organised – a few events provided directly by the Collective, and the majority by partners – there was not a consistent manner of evaluating events. Feedback was received from a variety of sources: evaluations of the workshops we provided ourselves; comments received from organisers of other events; an online survey of workshop leaders and other partners.

Audience Reach

A good way of gauging demand for the Festival is the rate of bookings received for each event. Twelve events could be booked in advance. Many of those sold out and all the others received a very high level of bookings. Workshops were open to 10-20 participants and in each case all or almost all the places were booked. One performance at the Scottish Story Telling Centre filled the 99-seater theatre and the other sold over 70 tickets.

Attendance at other events such as exhibitions is more difficult to count, but anecdotal and observation evidence suggests that they were also well attended. The opening event, Radical Voices, was full to capacity, and attracted some audience members who do not usually attend the monthly sessions. Modern Women Poets at the National Gallery also had a good audience, whilst Dare to Be Fair attracted Equate’s biggest ever audience for a talk.

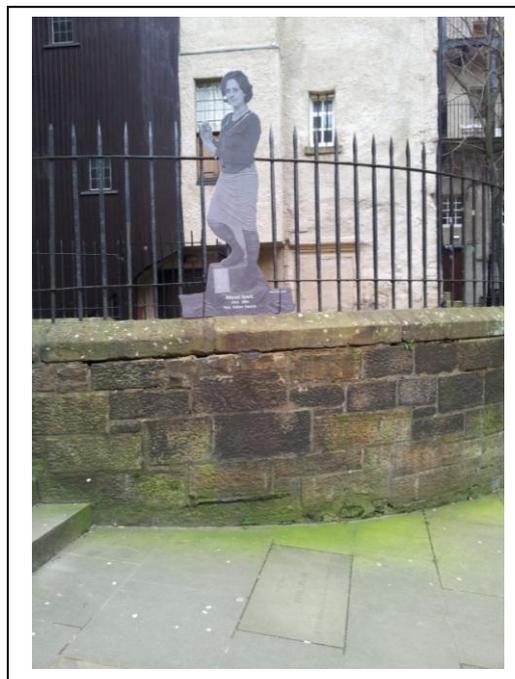
It was estimated that some 3000 people attended the Chaplaincy Centre where the Moving Minds exhibition was hung, but it is not possible to say definitively how many engaged with it, nor with the other exhibitions which were hung in public spaces (at Edinburgh Central Library, The Porty Lightbox and Gayfield Creative Spaces.)

Our most successful event in terms of audience reach were the pop-up statues of women organised by WIFIE (Women In Focus In Edinburgh). Almost life-size statues of five audacious Scottish women were made following the photography workshop and placed in appropriate locations around the city. As well as those who saw them in person, it achieved a reach of over 5,300 on our Facebook Page.

Comments included:

“This is great! I wish those statues were permanent.” (Comment on FB)

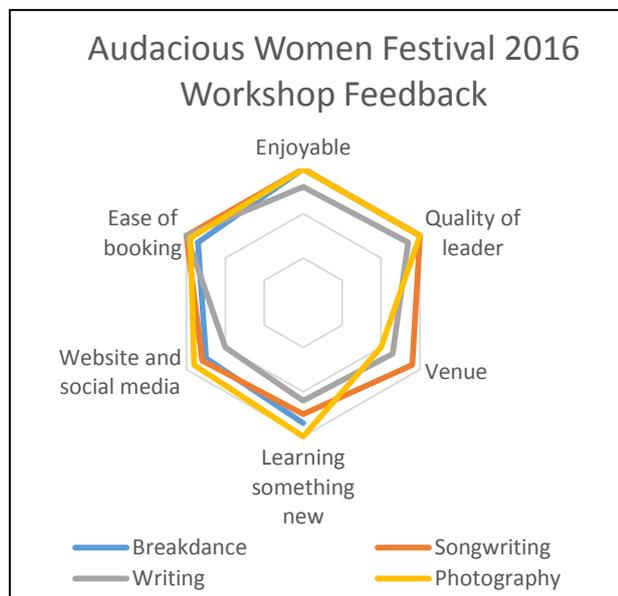
“We loved your women statues stunt and actually had a similar idea for our Scottish Manifesto launch on 2 April. I hope you’ll approve!” (email from WEP)



Statue of Muriel Spark at the Writers Museum overlooking the stone inscribed with her name

Views of Workshops Participants

Evaluation wheels were used to allow participants in 4 of the workshops organised directly by the Collective to evaluate their experience against 6 criteria shown on the diagram below. Generally, participants found their experience highly enjoyable and the quality of leaders excellent. One workshop designed for beginners was in fact attended by women with some previous experience, which meant fewer new skills were learned.



The diagram on the left is an aggregation of the evaluation wheels which were completed for four workshops. All but photography were held at the City Art Centre.

A few comments from participants were also received

"Really enjoyed the workshop"
(Photography)

"Thank you [for] encouraging women to value and express themselves + taking time to do so. Seems very important."
(Creative writing)

Views of Partners, Workshop Leaders and Performers

Some partners carried out separate event evaluations which also showed a positive response. Dare to Be Fair organised by Equate had very good feedback from the participants. The event received so many bookings that it had to be moved to a larger venue.

A Firewalk held for Gypsy traveller women, demonstrated a clear appreciation of the "audacious" focus of the AWF:

"We're audacious women and we're strong, we can do anything".

Partners and performers were invited to complete an online survey about their experience of working with the Festival and eight replies were received. All expressed support for a women's festival, saw the AWF 2016 as a successful start-up year, and also as an enhancement of their work:



"Great addition to our programming" (Storytelling Centre)

"The whole idea of being 'audacious' was extremely useful in working with Gypsy/Traveller women - especially in terms of building confidence/self-esteem" (Firewalk organiser)

"I think the ideas and drive behind the festival were great" (City Arts Centre)

"I think its just great to give people an opportunity to come together and celebrate being women and challenging oneself." (Graffiti workshop organiser)

All partners expressed interest in taking part in the next festival, and made suggestions for new events, venues and publicity which would help the AWF reach a wider audience. Several partners identified marketing and publicity as a weakness, feeling that social media could be better exploited and more resources were needed to bring a wider audience reach.

Venues

We only received feedback about two of the venues we used. The City Art Centre hosted the majority of the workshops and was a successful and popular venue. The photography workshop took place in a different venue which had an unlit path and was unsuitable for use at night and was seen as poor as a result.



The City Art Centre provided an excellent venue for the Breakdancing workshop

Digital Media

Our social media and website were less well rated both by participants in workshops and performers and workshop leaders. In particular, there was some concern that we had not generated enough advance publicity for some events. This was caused by a combination of short timescales, lack of resources, and being a new organisation with little recognition.

We used Eventbrite for advance bookings and that system was seen as easy to use.

Funding

The Festival is run by a voluntary Collective and started with no funds. All events were free other than the Collective's fund-raising evening and the events at the SSTC, who charged their normal rates. A last minute grant of £1,200 from the NHS Mental Health and Well-being Team allowed us to pay workshop leaders and to pay for printed programmes and promotional materials. Some funds were also raised through a raffle and the sale of merchandise.

We invited people's views on pricing for future events. Most workshop participants indicated that they would be prepared to pay £4.00 - £8.00 for similar events in future (although it is also worth noting that the SSTC prices were higher than this and all their events attracted excellent audiences.) Most partners and performers felt that a charge of £5-£10 would be appropriate. However, several noted that their audience came from excluded communities and might find payment of more than £2 a disincentive.



Media and Other Coverage

Glasgow City FC Women's Team generously allowed us to sponsor their programme, giving us great advance publicity to a wide audience.

BBC Radio Scotland conducted an interview with several organisers and performers, leading to a 5 minute item on Good Morning Scotland and an online article: [Breaking Down Barriers At the Audacious Women Festival](#). An opinion piece in the List was equally positive: [Why the Audacious Women Festival is Daring and Necessary](#).

Legacy

It is difficult to assess the legacy of the Festival, not least because we had no effective means of gathering information about acts that individual women had undertaken. Nevertheless, we have been told of some examples that suggest a number of women continue to benefit from the Festival. They include:

- ✓ A group of 3 women who attended the creative writing workshop continue to meet regularly to support each other
- ✓ One woman was inspired by Audacious Women to take a new direction in her work
- ✓ Another woman was inspired by the Festival to organise a local community festival with her neighbours and intends to do so again next year.
- ✓ The statue of Elizabeth Blackwell (medical herbal illustrator) now has a permanent home in Napier Herbalists.

Strengths

- ✓ The partnership approach brought vital resources to achieve the aims of the AWF
- ✓ The AWF is the only women's festival in Edinburgh, and judging from the audience levels and feedback, clearly meets a demand.
- ✓ The events attracted some strong partners such as CAC, the Storytelling Centre, Equate Scotland, NHS Lothian, NGS and the Scottish Parliament, and some high profile participants such as Kezia Dugdale, Shona Robson and Leanne Dempster.
- ✓ Our partners reported the Festival as significantly enhancing their audience figures
- ✓ Participants came from a wide range of backgrounds and age-groups, including groups such as gypsy travellers and women experiencing mental ill-health
- ✓ Partners brought significant diversity to the AWF in terms of the type and style of event, performers and audiences.
- ✓ The AWF attracted significant media attention, including an interview with Radio Scotland, and a social media reach of over 5000 for the "Where have all the women gone?" event.



Shona Robison, Shulah Allan, Kezia Dugdale and Leanne Dempster, Conversing Audaciously

Weaknesses

- ✓ Although events were fully booked there was some "drop out" in some events, as is common with free events
- ✓ Venue space was determined by what partners could provide on a free basis.
- ✓ As most events were free, only limited funds were raised towards the 2017 AWF. More work needs to be done to make the AWF financially sustainable.
- ✓ The AW Collective was small, and highly stretched to manage the programme.
- ✓ Partly because of that, combined with the short timescale, publicity and marketing for the AWF was limited, and needs a wider reach
- ✓ The website also needed improvement
- ✗ Although we generally reached appropriate audiences, bringing in women from some excluded groups, a wider reach would be preferred.

Audacious Women Festival 2017

Given the general reception of the AWF, positive feedback from both audiences and partners, and sufficient funds to underpin expenses, the AWC has decided to take the festival forward in 2017. The aims will remain the same, but more focus will be put on:

- ▽ Emphasising opportunities for participants to undertake their own audacious acts and attempting to improve the recording of these
- ▽ Encouraging content which celebrates and encourages audacious women, with emphasis on themes around bold actions and unconventional outcomes.
- ▽ Looking for financial sustainability through a charging strategy
- ▽ Improving marketing and publicity to improve audience reach
- ▽ Refreshing and improving the website to increase functionality, using evidence from AWF 2016 to build audience attraction



Top left: Breaking the Mould Exhibition @ Edinburgh Library
Bottom left: Penny Stone opening Radical Voices
Above: Alice Fernbank performing Bold Daughters @ SSTC

