



For immediate release

Edinburgh International Book Festival Communities Programme participants celebrate success of 2024

- Today, **December 12 2024**, participants of the Edinburgh International Book Festival Communities Programme came together to celebrate a successful 12 months that has seen **26 authors and artists** engage with over **28 community organisations** and **1,800+ individuals**
- The **Edinburgh International Book Festival Communities Programme 2024** is year-round and brings local people and organisations together with professional writers and artists.
- Thanks to the support of players of **People's Postcode Lottery**, the programme engaged communities across Scotland
- Authors including **Jordan Stephens, Jenni Fagan, Andrew O'Hagan, Amy Liptrot, Joe Coelho,** and **Sophy Henn** visited schools, prisons, hospitals, and local reading centres in 2024
- Other activity included events streamed to **The Birks** cinema in Aberfeldy and a public stories submissions campaign collecting memories linked to the Festival's new home; **Words from the Wards**
- The 2024 Festival itself saw the culmination of a activity that took place throughout the year, with performances from **Scotland 2049** and **Stories & Scran** presented on stage.
- You can find images of participants, authors and artists who took part in this year's Communities Programme **HERE**



Participants of the Edinburgh International Book Festival Communities Programme came together in Edinburgh today, Thursday 12 December, to celebrate a year that saw 26 authors and artists engage with over 28 community organisations, and over 1,800 individuals, over the course of it.

A year-round calendar of events made possible thanks to players of People's Postcode Lottery, the Communities programme connects authors and artists with communities across Scotland who may not otherwise have had access to cultural experiences. In August authors including **Andrew O'Hagan**, **Amy Liptrot**, **Joe Coelho**, and **Sophy Henn** connected with new audiences for readings and in-person events in eight prisons including HMP Barlinnie and HMP & YOI Polmont, as well as the Royal Hospital for Children and Young People.

Jenni Fagan, author and poet, said: *“Edinburgh International Book Festival create partnerships whereby writers can visit and host workshops or readings within the Scottish prison system. This is an extraordinarily important programme. It allows those currently trying to rebuild their lives, access to a wide demographic of writers and stories.*

My most recent visit was with Liliac Centre in Glasgow, whose groundbreaking and progressive facility should be upheld as a blueprint for allowing women in prison to live in an environment focused on their journey and how best to facilitate skillsets that will build confidence and independence on their release. It is not possible to overstate that this access to workshops with guest writers, should be considered a cornerstone element, it generates conversation from the women in prison, inspiration in sharing stories, listening (writers must open the floor and really listen all attending the workshops / as they listen to each other too). It is vital to host these workshops in a way that puts each individual in a position where they may choose to share their own voice, or their own stories, if they choose to.

As part of my writing life, I have found taking my work out into communities that maybe cannot attend readings or may have less easy access to a wide library, is some of the most important and rewarding work I do."

Thanks to the support of players of People's Postcode Lottery, the power of words was brought not only to prisons, but schools, hospitals, cinemas and local reading centres across Scotland in 2024, as part of the Communities Programme.

In Edinburgh, the team worked with Simon Community Scotland's **Streetreads Library**, which helps to support those experiencing homelessness, on reading events with visiting **authors Jordan Stephens** and **Salena Godden**.



Photo: Jordan Stephens at Edinburgh International Book Festival 2024

Credit: Edinburgh International Book Festival

Jordan Stephens, British musician, actor, and presenter and author, said: *"I had the absolute privilege of being able to chat to people struggling with homelessness and addiction at the [Streetreads] library. They listened to me read out sections of my book and asked me questions. It was actually a really great*

experience because I felt super connected to everybody's journey, people who have been through much harder times than me. Any opportunity to be part of a communities programme means a lot to me."

Further afield in Aberfeldy, The Birks cinema, for the fourth year in a row, screened a record number of 22 events with a total audience of 254. Organiser Fiona MacEwan said that both The Birks team and the local community were 'delighted'.

Fiona MacEwan, Programme and Community Development Manager at The Birks cinema, went on to say: *"Many of our audience love the book festival but are unable to get to Edinburgh anymore to attend in person due to personal circumstances but love feeling that they are still part of the audience...thanks again to the whole team for enabling this possibility - it is so amazing to get this opportunity to participate as it can be really challenging (sometimes impossible) to get to Edinburgh."*

Fiona also highlighted that these events have a positive impact on the wider community and tourism economy, saying: *"Some audience members were on holiday and said they would be back again next year at the same time so that they could come again."*

Throughout the year community memories were collected and shared in **Words from the Wards**, a project celebrating the Festival's new home at Edinburgh Futures Institute and honouring the building's incredible legacy as the city's former Royal Infirmary. The project collected stories and memories already created in the building – from new births and mourned passings to the careers of the doctors and nurses who worked there – and saw them shared in the former wards alongside new contributions from eight leading writers and artists, including previous and new Edinburgh Makars **Hannah Lavery** and **Michael Pederson, Dr Gavin Francis,, Sara Sheridan, Lisa Williams** and **Kirstin Innes**.

Schools writer-in-residence **Ryan van Winkle** also invited young people from across Scotland to share their vision for the country's future with **Scotland 2049**, a project celebrating the milestone of 25 years of devolution in partnership with the Festival of Politics.

The hugely popular **Stories & Scran** event returned for a fifth year, with Communities writer-in-residence **Eleanor Thom** teaming up with local social enterprise Scran Academy to present storytelling created by young people and adults from across Edinburgh and the Lothians, while the Festival's residency at the Alternative School at Spartans Community Foundation continued with young people from the school alongside writer **Chris Barkley** sharing their brand-new documentary film, *If the World Was Mine*, in a fun and fast-paced live event.

500 free tickets for events during the Festival were also given to community groups across Edinburgh, while more than 4,500 school children from 89 schools across Scotland were transported to the Festival (31 groups free of charge), to attend free events and each take home a free book.

Noëlle Cobden, Communities Programme Director at Edinburgh International Book Festival, said: *"Year on year we see the impact that our Communities activity, supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery, has, not only in Edinburgh but in communities across the country. We bring the world of books to those who may never come across it otherwise. For many, meeting an author like Jordan Stephens or Amy Liptrot, Jenny Fagan, can be life changing. Our programme also boosts local economies*

by providing the opportunity for other organisations to engage with new and existing audiences, exemplified by The Birks cinema in Aberfeldy.”

[LINK TO PHOTOS HERE](#)

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About Edinburgh International Book Festival

We are Edinburgh International Book Festival: the world-leading festival of words, literature, and ideas.

We believe in the power of words and ideas to ignite imaginations, foster human connection, and challenge the status quo. Committed to innovation, inclusivity and accessibility, we platform voices who are often overlooked, and aim to break down barriers to access for those who might not typically see themselves as a book festival audience.

Since 1983, we've welcomed hundreds of thousands of visitors to engage with the world's greatest and emerging writers, thinkers, artists, and performers. Iconic figures such as Margaret Atwood, Alain de Botton, Oliver Burkeman, Noam Chomsky, Seamus Heaney, Kazuo Ishiguro, Toni Morrison, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie and Benjamin Zephaniah have appeared on our stages over the years, alongside a wide range of debut and early career authors.

Each year, we programme hundreds of events that capture the hearts and minds of audiences, both in Edinburgh and online. Whether they take the form of on-stage conversations, workshops, creative masterclasses, think tanks, or more, they are all informed by a culture of open dialogue. Our programme is designed not just to spark new conversations amongst audiences, but to broaden them too: existing as a space where nuanced discussion happens, and ideas can settle.

As the world around us changes at pace, the Book Festival continues to transform too. 2024 is the beginning of an exciting new chapter under the leadership of our new director, Jenny Niven, as we also move to our new home at the Edinburgh Futures Institute.

More than just a summer festival, we work year-round with partners in the local community – with schools, libraries, prisons, hospitals, and other community hubs – to foster a lifelong love of reading and develop engaged, knowledgeable audiences of all backgrounds and ages. We also stream hundreds of

events online via a Pay What You Can model, offering audiences who cannot attend in person the opportunity to take part and experience the excitement of the Festival wherever and whenever suits them best.

For more information visit: www.edbookfest.co.uk/