



LANCASHIRE

Where we work, with whom and why

Updated October 2018



Spot On Lancashire is a grassroots community focused arts service which enables people in remote rural and isolated urban communities to enjoy a live arts experience in a community venue on their doorstep. We are working to ensure no-one in Lancashire is more than five miles from one of our cultural offers. The opportunity to enjoy a night out at a jazz event, a theatre show, or a dance performance should not just be something those who are able to live near an arts centre can enjoy. The arts can travel to you instead.

If you are new to the idea of community touring, please check out this video promoting rural touring across the UK (ian macmillan link please from NRTF) also, we have our (own video from 2011).

Our service is about people, not buildings. We support people in isolated communities who want to put on professional shows and we help those artists who want to tour to isolated communities to do so. Our aim is to remove the barriers that can stop people from having a great night out at an arts event, be it age, mobility, isolation, access to transport, or finances. Our audiences are all very local to each event we support (they tell us they travel fewer than five miles to our shows) and we are only visible when an event happens. Our everyday presence is via our staff and our social media. We like to think we are a well kept secret, working all over the county.

We have been going since 1995, and we keep growing, changing and evolving. We have two strands of activity which are our core focus over the next four years (2018 - 2022) and our ability to deliver them is affected by volunteer availability (or enthusiasm!), suitability of the community venue for a show and the expectations of the very important public funding we require to ensure the service can operate. We rely on investment from Arts Council England, Lancashire County Council, four local authorities (Wyre, Fylde, Ribble Valley and Blackburn with Darwen) donations and sponsorship, and of course, ticket income. All of these affect what we offer, and where we put it. It is important to us, and our funders that our resources are spent on people who would not otherwise have the opportunity to see such an arts event.



Some definitions:

A *promoter*: could be a librarian, a volunteer from a village hall, a group of friends. Anyone who is enthusiastic about the arts and wants to share that passion with others. We can give

you support and training. You could be an 18 year old keen to bring something to your community for your friends, a parent wanting something for local children or an older person with time on your hands and skills to offer.

A community venue: This can range from a library, to a village, church or school hall. We ask that you are willing to think about what your whole community might like (although beginning with a network of friends and working outwards is a great plan) and you can find a building into which we can tour a show. It can be large or small but does need to be as accessible as possible to as many people. We have even used cattle markets and boatsheds. Or the outdoors! Imagination is your only limit. We do ask that you embrace the UK Equality Law - Can as many people from your community as possible use this venue? Is it friendly? Can they park? Is there room for prams, or for those who use wheelchairs? We can help you with this. Access is not just physical. Perhaps your biggest audience are people who would like to see a show during the day time?

A professional artist: We offer up a curated menu to our registered promoters. This menu is managed by us so we can provide something which communities can enjoy, but also meets the quality expectations of our main funders, the Arts Council. A professional artist is someone who earns most of their income (their job!) from the work they produce and tour. They are all screened by us for costs, technical demands and a willingness to work with the joys and demands of a non-specialised space. (ie, a village hall, not a dance studio).

The audience: your local networks, people who love arts, people who might like a night out, people who you don't know but you think might come to a show. It could be local parents for a children's show, the very elderly in your community might like a matinee, others are keen to see performances from around the world, or work which reflects the rich diversity of the British Isles. You'll be surprised at what people enjoy and it's good to be adventurous. We are here to help you take measured risks.

Curated menu: We receive an immense amount of offers from artists. We simply cannot handle them all, and not all meet the mark in terms of the quality we like to offer, the cost, the technical limits of different spaces, or dates. We try to filter out and offer up a broad but realistic range of listed options (a menu) from which we hope our promoters can find something suitable for them. Our choices are dictated by how much budget we have, how many shows we need to make happen (and can manage), audience demographics and artform variety. We reserve the right to have the final word in this matter!



Rural and remote

We began as a rural service but this has now changed. This is a result of local authority and art funding cuts and we have now focussed our rural service to only those villages who have limited or no public transport; no other

cultural offer nearby; help us fulfill a strategic goal or are in an authority which is still able to support the work we do. If your community has a night time bus service to a market town, or is on a train line to a city with an arts centre, then at present we cannot support you but it's great these services are there! This change to our rural activity is still underway and we do have some historical relationships which will change if the local community stops supporting the shows, or the promoters want a rest.

Urban and isolated

We have been developing a library strand to our work. This has introduced us to some wonderful new promoters - the county's librarians - and has brought new ideas and new audiences to the network. It has also enabled us to sustain some very important and crucial public funding. Our work in libraries focuses on the smaller libraries outside of the towns where other cultural activities exist. Sometimes we might do something in a larger town, but it would be a specific project. Sometimes we may be in a library in a community where we can no longer support a rural promoter. This is simply a result of different funding streams and often the library work is the only way we can justify being in that community. Our work is about art and audiences, not buildings.

Special projects

Sometimes we are able to have adventures, or work in communities which don't fit the above two strands. This is usually governed by either something exciting arriving in our inbox or an organisation wanting to pay us to work with them. For example, the chance to promote a dance show in a bus or a theatre performance in a van has led us to approach some promoters or communities to make it happen. Other times, we are approached by other organisations, or local authorities to help make something happen locally.

Who invests in us and why this affects our work

The Arts Council is our principal supporter. They like to see cultural provision in areas that are underprovided for, and for our audiences to be people who might otherwise not be able to enjoy a live show, for example children, the elderly, people who have limited transport. They also like to support contemporary art, and some particular art forms. This investment supports our outreach staff team and enables us to offer up excellent theatre, dance and music to you at a price a small community venue can afford.

Lancashire County Council supports our work in the libraries and their investment helps cover the cost of shows, some of our staffing, and marketing. We have a small amount of highly valued support from four borough authorities. This investment is diminishing but it helps cover artist fees, and touring costs to you if we meet some of the needs of the authority. Where we have lost this funding, we have had to reduce the number of shows we can support in a particular area of the county, or change the type of show offered to a community group to ensure that the fees are covered by ticket income.

Trusts, charities and other public funds

Sometimes we have specific support, for say a particular group of people. Our partnership with Big Imaginations children's theatre consortium supports us to bring children's shows to smaller venues. Our work with Folkus supports us to bring international folk music to Lancashire.

Ticket income

Very important! Without the support of audiences who buy tickets, our shows could not happen. The more tickets people buy, the less public subsidy per show we need. But we do have to balance the need to sell tickets, with a broad offer to local audiences and accept that our work is about enabling people to enjoy an arts experience. Sometimes this can only happen with public funding support to ensure isolated communities can have an arts offer of the same quality as someone in a large town. Ticket prices need to reflect the quality of shows but not be set too high to exclude local people on low incomes. Our work is about enabling people to enjoy a cultural experience; earning money is a crucial and important part of what we do, but we are a not for profit service aiming to improve the quality of isolated people's lives by helping people enjoy a live arts event on their doorstep.