



# The difference we made

April 2024 – March 2025



DIY Theatre Community Interest Company

April 2024 – March 2025

“We want to change the world and change perceptions – people shouldn’t just cast people aside – they should always listen to us!”

Charlotte, DIY Artist, talking about the Acting for Health project



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## Who we are

DIY is an established Learning Disability Theatre Company based in Salford. We are a Community Interest Company, member-led and our Board comprises mainly disabled people. We have been creating accessible and thought-provoking theatre and creative projects for over 30 years!

## We make a difference by:

- ★ Challenging preconceptions and barriers through high quality performance, education projects and research.
- ★ Celebrating diversity and creativity in all areas of our work.
- ★ Promoting the achievements of performers and creative leaders with learning disabilities and sharing good practice.

Our vision is a world where performers, theatre-makers and arts leaders with learning disabilities are valued as part of the rich diversity of our cultural sector and our society.

DIY is a Community Interest Company Reg. N° 07128047  
Registered address:

DIY Theatre Company  
The Angel Centre, 1 St Philip's Place, Salford M3 6FA

[www.diytheatre.org.uk](http://www.diytheatre.org.uk)

 [diytheatreco](https://www.instagram.com/diytheatreco)

 [DIY Theatre Company](https://www.facebook.com/DIYTheatreCompany)

# Introduction

2024 was our 30th birthday year and what a celebration it was! It was a great chance to celebrate 30 years of creating accessible and thought-provoking theatre and educational projects and it was also an important opportunity to reflect on our past to make plans for the future.

We began with preparations for our 30th birthday events; bringing to life three special projects that used film, textiles and photography to creatively tell our stories.

We then celebrated our 30th anniversary with two public events during Summer 2024; 'Exploring Our Past, Facing our Futures' took place on 18th June 2024 at the New Adelphi, University of Salford, and "Close Knit" took place on 21st June at the Angel Centre.

The year wasn't only about celebrating our 30th! There are lots of other highlights included in this Impact Report.



# The difference we made – highlights from the year 2024-25:

## Exploring our Past, Shaping our Futures – 30th birthday projects:



- ★ Celebrated the art and culture of people with lived experience of learning disability.
- ★ Highlighted the achievements of DIY members past and present .
- ★ Documented the challenges and successes of the last 30 years.
- ★ Reflected on the past to move forward into the future.

## Hanging by a Thread – touring our new multi-sensory performance:



- ★ Opened up new creative opportunities to sensory audiences of children, young people, and adults.
- ★ Increased audiences' environmental awareness and connection with nature.
- ★ Developed artists' skills and adaptability through developing outdoor arts.

## Gamechangers – 'Acting for Health' films and resources that:



- ★ Tackled health inequalities experienced by people with learning disabilities.
- ★ Worked toward better health and social care outcomes for people with learning disabilities.
- ★ Contributed to Health professionals becoming better informed about working with people with learning disabilities.
- ★ Encouraged Healthcare professionals to develop more inclusive communication skills.

## **We Claim the Hall** – collaborative project with Uncurbed Collective (formerly Proud and Loud Arts):



- ★ Responded to diverse community and cultural interests.
- ★ Explored and highlighted issues of inequity and inequality.
- ★ Strengthened community empowerment and co-creation.
- ★ Offered new insight into approaches to widen audiences and increase cultural engagement in Salford.

Photo by Phil Smethurst, Manchester Lights Media

## **Community Education**

– creative courses for adults with learning disabilities:



- ★ Increased the creative and essential skills of adults with learning disabilities including communication, group-working and presentation skills.
- ★ Increased the connections amongst people and reduced social isolation
- ★ Positively impacted on the health and wellbeing of participants.
- ★ Increased participants' confidence and self-esteem and raised aspirations.

## **Transforming Leadership** – national training programme and conference:



- ★ Provided paid training to two DIY Leaders.
- ★ Enabled DIY to start to develop Pathways to employment.
- ★ Shared knowledge and learning gained from the Transforming Leadership Programme with a wider audience.



# DIY's productions and projects

DIY's productions are based on our own ideas and experiences. We use lots of different art forms and aim to make our work as accessible as possible.



## 30th birthday celebrations

To celebrate DIY's 30th Birthday, we developed a series of creative projects that used film, textiles and photography to creatively tell our stories.

We then marked our 30th anniversary with two well-attended events called **Exploring Our Past, Facing our Futures** and **Close Knit**, where we celebrated thirty years of creativity and leadership.

# Thirty Profiles

Thirty Profiles is a wonderful photography exhibition co-created by photographer Audrey Albert and DIY Artists and Leaders as part of DIY's 30th Birthday celebrations.

Each portrait was co-created by a DIY artist working with photographer Audrey Albert to represent their unique identities and the things that are most important to them.

The exhibition is a colourful display of individuality, showcasing everything from creative skills to personal interests and experiences. It captures and celebrates the many, unique voices and stories within DIY Theatre Company.

The Thirty Profiles exhibition was first unveiled at our 30th Birthday celebration event at The Angel Centre on Friday 21st of June 2024.

Thirty Profiles was funded by the Whose Art, Whose Culture Fund, managed by Salford CVS on behalf of Salford City Council; monies from the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund via Greater Manchester Combined Authority.



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# Close Knit

Close Knit is a stunning textile piece designed by DIY artists and participants working with visual artist Claire Hignett as part of DIY's 30th Birthday celebrations in 2024.

Together, we printed self-portraits and our favourite DIY Theatre memories onto fabric. Claire then used these pieces to create a textile work that celebrates DIY's history and who we are today.

Alongside the development of the soft handling sculpture, DIY members worked with film-maker Hilary Easter Jones to create a film which documented the process of creating the sculpture - and captured some of the discussions and stories that emerged as the textile piece was being created.



“Textiles is a great way to work with lots of different people including people who are non-verbal and to communicate with people who are non-verbal”

DIY Artist

“We want people to see our creative work and how we use drama and textiles. Everyone with a learning disability has a voice!”

DIY Artist

# Exploring our Past, Shaping our Futures



In this film project, led by filmmaker Hilary Easter-Jones, DIY artists and leaders from the Core Company and DIY Gamechangers programme came together to create a film showcasing DIY Theatre's history and legacy over the past 30 years.

The film shows lots of the different elements of DIY's work including performances, leadership, cultural education and advocacy.

We shared the film at the first of our special birthday events on 18th June 2024 at the New Adelphi, University of Salford.



# ‘Exploring Our Past, Shaping Our Futures’ Event – 18th June 2024

Held at the New Adelphi, University of Salford, this event began with a welcome song from DIY company members and then Jenny Sealey OBE (*pictured, top right*) officially opened the event with a speech – Jenny is Artistic Director of Graeae Theatre Company as well as a DIY Patron.

We premiered our Exploring our Past, Shaping our Futures “ film, which highlighted our outstanding work in performance, leadership, cultural education and advocacy. The afternoon featured more films, songs, performances and even sensory activities from our multi-sensory shows for the audience to enjoy.

“ The pace was very engaging and everyone was so welcoming. It’s been a pleasure to see all of the fantastic work that DIY does and I can’t wait to see more!”

Audience member

“ The performances were really encouraging. You’ve involved the audience and we could feel the meaning of each performance.”

Audience member

# 'Close Knit' Event – 21st June 2024

We invited our friends, families and networks to view an exhibition of past and present DIY work at The Angel Centre in Salford. The exhibition unveiled two special pieces: the Close Knit textile project created with Clare Hignett and Thirty Profiles, the photography collection created with Audrey Albert.

“Very impacted and emotional and happy for the DIY members and crew well done! Hope its functions and goes on for many years into the future with such grace and dignity to its lovely participants.”

Audience member

“It was good to learn the history of DIY Theatre and learn that it has been going for so long. And it was interesting to see some of the work that DIY Theatre members have created.”

Audience member

A participatory workshop with Nerissa Cargill Thompson gathered feedback and suggestions by making flowers from recycled materials. Beka Haigh created a visual record of the event.





## As Seen on the BBC!

We were very proud that our birthday celebrations were featured on BBC News!

Just before Learning Disability Week, reporter Molly Brewer and her camera crew came to visit us during rehearsals for our birthday celebrations. Molly talked to core company members about their experiences with DIY Theatre and what makes our work special. She even joined in as we sang our astronaut song!

On the day of our first 30th birthday event, our story was shown three times on BBC News: during North West Today, North West Tonight, and the Late News. It was also shared online on the BBC North West website, helping even more people learn about DIY Theatre and the creativity of our members.

# 'Celebrating Me' at Chatsworth High

As part of an outreach project at Chatsworth High, linked with our birthday celebrations and exhibition, 13 Post 19 learners took part in workshops linked with our birthday celebrations, the exhibitions and the theme of "celebrating me".

Feedback sessions took place with learners and staff at the end of each session and notes were gathered by the DIY team. Learners identified that:

- ★ they liked touching and exploring the textile pieces
- ★ they enjoyed using different materials to create their pennants.
- ★ they liked choosing their threads and fabrics
- ★ they enjoyed connecting with each other.
- ★ they liked working with the different colours and materials
- ★ they enjoyed creating a piece of artwork as a group.

Staff identified that the project contributed to the personal targets of number of the individual learners in such areas as communication, working with others, expressing choices and preferences, speaking and listening.





# 30th birthday exhibition at Eccles Community Art Gallery

A further opportunity to view *Thirty Profiles* and *Close Knit* was offered by a DIY exhibition, developed in partnership with Eccles Community Art Gallery which took place between Friday 11th October and Saturday 2nd of November.

We also hosted an Open Day on Saturday 2nd of November, where visitors had a chance to meet some of the DIY artists - and artists Claire Hignett and Audrey Albert.

20 people attended the Open Day event and took part in participatory arts activities. They were encouraged to draw their responses to the exhibition and combine these drawings and written comments into a collage created at the event.

“I think the exhibition's brilliant. I think all the photos are fantastic- they're very colourful.”

Exhibition visitor

“Wonderful colourful photos. It looks like a happy group. Love the 'game' I'm always restricted by rules. This game has no rules!! Love it.”

Exhibition visitor

“I love all the softness and cuddliness of the piece and all the powerful stories, shows and people behind it.”

Exhibition visitor

We evaluated our Birthday activities against the **five health and wellbeing outcomes** (NEF).

First we did a game that reminded us of what each outcome is about, then we explored how the project related to that outcome. We found that the 30th Birthday project fulfilled all five health and wellbeing outcomes:

## Connect

- ★ We connected with our past and with past members
- ★ We connected with each-other and our families
- ★ We connected with groups across DIY
- ★ We connected with artists
- ★ We connected with people who came to the event
- ★ We connected with other organisations that work with disabled people like Aspire Waterside and Proud and Loud Arts.

## Learn

- ★ We learnt photography – filming - printing – painting – drawing.
- ★ We learnt performance skills – we learnt our lines – we learnt about moving in the space.
- ★ We learnt about history and the past – like about past members who have died or moved on – we saw pictures of members when they were younger – we learnt about past shows.

## Give

We gave people tickets to the birthday events – we made them feel surprised – we made them feel joyful – happy – delighted – smiling – excited – brilliant – proud -we made them feel wonderful.

## Take notice

The project helped us take notice, focus and concentrate in the moment. When we were performing at the events we had to keep our eyes forward – we kept focused. We had to take notice of where we are on the stage and where other peoples' positions were.

## Keep active

We were moving about in different positions – we did movements and actions in our performance – we did 'magic' actions to reveal the exhibition.

# Hanging by a Thread

DIY Theatre Company have been touring again with our sensory show Hanging by a Thread. This is DIY's third show specifically designed for sensory audiences. The show takes audiences on a magical journey to connect with nature and encourage them to care for the environment.

Interactive theatre, songs, live music, puppets and sensory props combine to create an intimate multi-sensory experience for each audience member.



DIY's Core Company toured our multi-sensory show, *Hanging by a Thread*, to lots of venues across the North West, including *Aspire-Waterside*, *Aspire – St George's*, *We Invented the Weekend* at *Salford Quays*, *Darnhill Festival* in *Rochdale*, *Cartwheel Arts* at *Peoples History Museum*, *Delamere School* and *Bury College*.

We continued to share "*Hanging by a Thread*" with young audiences of learner with learning disabilities. In January we received a wonderful welcome from students and staff at *Delamere Primary School*, including:

- “ [DIY] actors are a role model to lots of our children and what they can achieve and take part in.”
- “ Fabulous resources. Allowed for processing time with our children and young people. Provided good role models. Understood children's needs and used your knowledge of this to support them to access the performance and build positive relationships.”
- “ Complements our existing offer of using interactive sensory stories to access the curriculum. Adds to supporting all children to access theatre – something that we do in school, but there are barriers and not everyone can attend.”



During February 2025 we performed twice to two wonderful audiences of sensory learners at Bury College. Congratulations to 15 students from Bury College who achieved their Discover Arts Award through participation in the pre-show workshops and attending the performance itself.

“ The certificates arrived on Thursday. They are so lovely - thanks so much! Aliyah and Jakub were particularly thrilled to receive them and took them home very carefully! ”

Alison Ketley, Lecturer in SLDD/PMLD, Bury College



We have also introduced the show to older audiences. In partnership with Aspire in Salford we toured our “Hanging by a Thread” show to adults with learning disabilities in three Aspire venues across the city; Aspire-Waterside, Aspire-St George’s and Aspire, Alexandra Hub. We’ve had lots of great feedback from staff at Alexandra Hub:

“ Opened our eyes to more sensory activities and everyone felt included.”

“ Showing us anything is possible.”

“ Great songs to join in with.”

“ Very inclusive and shows everybody has abilities.”

“ We really enjoyed it here at Alexandra Hub and it was very sensory based which we loved. The actors were very confident which was great.”

On Thursday 10th October 2024, DIY were invited by Cartwheel Arts to present *Hanging by a Thread* at Cartwheel's Arts Conference – IMPACT; Reflect + Respond. The conference marked World Mental Health Day 2024 and celebrated Cartwheel Art's 40th Birthday. It took place at Peoples' History Museum and brought together health professionals, arts organisations, education professionals, creative practitioners, and voluntary sector partners to reflect on the changes and developments in high-quality participatory arts practise that support the health and well-being of diverse communities across the North West.

We also performed the show outdoors. On Sunday June 16th we performed twice at Salford's We Invented the Weekend Festival and on Saturday 6th July 2024 we performed at Darnhill Festival. At both events it was great to try out the show in a festival setting and to see how well young audiences and families engaged with the piece.





# 8

performances of *Hanging by a Thread* were given at:

- ★ Aspire St George's
- ★ Aspire Waterside
- ★ We Invented the Weekend x 2
- ★ Delamere School
- ★ Bury College x 2
- ★ Alexandra Hub

# 200

audience members saw *Hanging by a Thread*

# 3

*Hanging by a Thread* workshops were delivered:

- ★ Bury College x 3

# 31

participants were supported to complete their Discover Arts Award through *Hanging by a Thread* performances and workshops.

# Summer project: We Claim the Hall



Photo by Phil Smethurst, Manchester Lights Media

During Summer 2024, artists from DIY Theatre and Uncurbed Collective (Formerly Proud & Loud Arts) undertook a collaborative project that was all about the voices of disabled people being heard within the development of Salford's Cultural Strategy.

A two-week Summer residency took place during August 2024 when DIY artists Anna, Cathy, Amy, Paul, and Robert joined up with five artists from Uncurbed Collective and the brilliant Company Chameleon for a fantastic creative collaboration.

The first week of the project was based at the University of Salford. DIY artists worked with Company Chameleon's co-artistic director, Kevin Edward Turner and five artists from Uncurbed Collective to co-

create a series of movement sections that explored everyone's thoughts, feelings and experiences of Salford's cultural spaces.

In the second week, the movement pieces created at New Adelphi were performed in cultural venues across Salford including Salford Museum and Art Gallery, The Lowry, Media City, Walk the Plank, Ordsall Hall, Eccles Library, and START therapeutic gardens.

Two films were created – a thought-provoking process film documenting the journey and highlighting issues that emerged during the project, and a beautiful artistic film of the creative work made by the ensemble.

This project was funded by the Arts and Culture Fund Managed by Salford CVS on behalf of Salford City Council; monies from the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund via Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

“It made a big difference because I'm coming out of my shell better and stuff and I look into people's eyes and stuff. So I don't feel as shy anymore.”

R, Artist

“It was overwhelming at the beginning but because we were there every day for two weeks I started to feel more relaxed as the days went on. I just felt really proud of myself for sticking with it.”

K, Artist

“I feel that we showed that we were present. And that's the most important thing about being present - letting people see what work we do and how important it is to us as artists....I do feel it was really important to be present and visible and also be heard.”

K, Artist



## DIY Gamechangers

DIY Gamechangers is DIY's Creative Leadership Training Programme. Sessions use drama to enable each person to explore their own unique leadership identity and to see how people can lead in different ways.



## Two different Gamechanger sessions were held each week:

Full day Gamechangers Leadership sessions for more experienced leaders were regularly attended by 11 participants.

Half-day weekly Gamechangers Emerging Leaders sessions, for those with less experience, were regularly attended by 7 participants.

## During 2024-25 Gamechangers training opportunities included:

- ★ Two full day Safeguarding Training sessions facilitated by Pathways Associates
- ★ Anti-Racism Training with Contact
- ★ Black History Month sessions facilitated by Jade Williams and DIY Leader Becky
- ★ Deaf Lived Experience facilitated by Manchester Deaf Centre
- ★ Evaluation training with Dr Roz Stewart-Hall to develop a methodology based on photo elicitation

DIY Gamechangers completed the first stage of an ambitious Acting for Health Project. This is designed to make an impact on health inequalities by creating films and other resources to be used in training for health professionals.

In November 2025, DIY Gamechangers started working with Coordinator Molly Stedman, to come up with ideas for the films and resources. They shared their own experiences of dealing with health professionals using role play and frozen pictures.

Gamechangers worked with film-maker Hilary Easter-Jones to build on these ideas and co-create three short films on the themes of Effective communication, Lived Experience Leadership and the 5 ways to Health and Wellbeing.

- ★ DIY's Five Ways to Wellbeing shows how DIY uses theatre and "human machines" to explore the Five Ways to Wellbeing.
- ★ Listen to us! explores why it is important for health professionals to recognise and value the lived experience of people with learning disabilities.
- ★ Talk to me! highlights the need for good communication between health professionals and people with learning disabilities and offers top tips on effective communication.





The first versions of the films were shared at two sessions with Salford Self-Advocacy group Listening to People. On 18th we attended a face-to-face session and on 20th March we attended an online session. Feedback was very positive and we gathered lots of useful feedback which fed into the final versions of the films:

- “ That happened to me, people would talk to my Mum and not me, it got on my nerves, it made me angry and made me feel like I didn’t have a voice.”
- “ This workshop and films should be in the media and on social media for everyone to see. You should do an awareness day about this.”

## Challenging health inequalities

Our aspirations for the Acting for Health project are:

- ★ Health professionals will become better informed through working with people with learning disabilities.
- ★ Healthcare professionals will develop more inclusive communication skills, leading to improved communication.
- ★ Increased communication and understanding will lead to better health and social care outcomes for people with learning disabilities.
- ★ Better outcomes for people with learning disabilities will lead to a reduction in health inequalities.

“DIY’s new films stop us being invisible – we’re knocking all the barriers away so we can be seen!”

“We can educate you and we can help you change your minds!”

“We want to change the world and change perceptions – people shouldn’t just cast people aside – they should always listen to us!”

“We are experts in lived experience

We live it every single day

We have experiences that professionals don’t

Listen to us

Don’t make assumptions

Let us change your minds and make things better.”



# Leading Edge

Leading Edge is DIY's ambitious Employability and Community Engagement programme for leaders with lived experience of learning disability.

During the year, DIY leaders have had lots of opportunities to use their leadership skills through co-leading sessions in schools, colleges, and community settings across the Northwest, as well as with Occupational Therapy students at the University of Salford and Medical students at the University of Manchester.



“I did not expect the sessions to be so much fun and utterly transformative!

Medical Student, University of Manchester



## Training Occupational Therapy students

In February 2025 Gamechangers Molly, Mike, Adam, Anna, and Charlotte co- led two full-day training sessions for Occupational Therapy (OT) students in the School of Health and Society as part of their 'Communication' module.

Gamechangers introduced the OT Students at the University of Salford to the Social Model of Health and DIY's application of the Five Ways to Wellbeing. They went on to explore the importance of people within the medical professions working directly with people with lived experience of learning disability. Feedback from the sessions was very positive and students appreciated the creative way they were run:

- “Hearing about the different experiences was helpful for learning how to be more intentional about communication.”
- “You guys are inspiring thank you so much for coming! I've learnt so much from hearing about your lived experiences and will keep it in mind during my work.”
- “Very interactive session, builds connections and awareness of differences in personalities, abilities etc.”



## Training Medical Students

During May 2024, DIY Gamechangers led two workshops with Medical Students at University of Manchester.

DIY has been delivering arts and health training for medical students at University of Manchester since 2019. This year DIY Gamechangers introduced students to the Social Model of Health and the Five Ways to Wellbeing (NEF). We introduced each of the ways to wellbeing through a series of practical games and exercises. We then went on to explore their relevance to Social Prescribing and evaluation of Creative Health projects.

“I did not expect the sessions to be so much fun and utterly transformative!”

“I think everyone can learn something from DIY’s sessions. The world would be a much nicer space if everyone had the opportunity to come.”

“Thanks to everyone at DIY for welcoming us in, this has been one of my favourite experiences during medical school...The people have all been fantastic and had a huge impact on me. Keep on being the amazing, inspiring people you are!”

“It was so amazing and insightful to hear everyone’s experiences, negative or positive!”

## Chatsworth Futures College

Every Thursday during term-time, DIY Lead Artist Jade Williams and DIY Gamechanger Chloe Crispin worked with learners from across the college, including two groups of students building independence skills, and two groups preparing for employment.

Chloe's leadership role in these sessions is part of a year-long internship with DIY Theatre Company.

91  
sessions

96  
learners

“I suggested songs we could use, which activities would be good for the learners and ideas on the props that we could use for the different activities... I enjoyed the Parachute Game and working with Jade and the Independence Group.”

Chloe Crispin

“I like working with the learners because they get very engaged. I facilitate the learners – I work with the learners at Chatsworth and we do activities. I'm good at leading the games – like Pass the Clap and Change 3 Things. The learners get really engaged. They're participating in the sessions really well.”

Chloe Crispin



# Co-leadership in action

## DIY BUDS

Becky and Adam have been co-leading sessions with DIY facilitator Georgia, building on leadership skills developed through DIY Gamechangers. They've been leading games and activities while also inventing creative ways to evaluate sessions, like an evaluation pizza, evaluation cake, and even an evaluation Christmas present!

“It has been a pleasure leading, and I would love the opportunity to do more.”

Becky

“Leading. I want to do more!”

Adam

## Aspire, St. George's

Angela, Amy and Chloe have been co-leading sessions for adults with learning disabilities throughout the year. They have stayed behind after each session to review what went well and plan for the following week.

“I think the sessions are going really well. Sometimes it's hard for people to come up with ideas, but we start off offering suggestions, and then they get into it.”

Amy, DIY Leader

“The group is focussing a lot better. We've done lots of focus games, and now they can concentrate for longer.”

Angela, DIY Leader

“I feel great leading at Aspire. I enjoy leading “pass the Clap” and playing different games. I'm looking forward to doing more leading at Aspire”

Chloe, DIY Leader

# Piper Hill

On Wednesday 19 March DIY Gamechanger Amy presented at a Careers Event as part of National Youth Theatre's youth drama project in three non-mainstream schools in GM called Assemble. The session took place at Piper Hill School, Wythenshawe. Its aim was to show young people the kinds of careers possible in performing arts.

Amy gave an informal talk about her role at DIY, the steps she took to get to where she is and the people and organisations she has networked with. She talked about DIY's multi-sensory practice and our current show *Hanging by a Thread* and the learners had a chance to get hands-on with some of the props from the show.

“What a lovely session. Thanks so much to you Amy and Mary for coming to Piper Hill and talking about DIY and sharing lovely ideas with the birds and props. I could tell the group loved it.”

Jen Harris (drama practitioner and mentor on the NYT Assemble programme)





# Transforming Leadership

**Transforming Leadership** was a two-year national initiative to develop learning disabled and autistic cultural leadership. The aims were:

- ★ Sharing skills and best practise in co-directing and inclusive governance amongst all partners.
- ★ Creating training and pathways for learning disabled and autistic leaders in co-directing and governance.
- ★ Developing relationships with local arts venues to foster genuine inclusion and representation of learning disabled and autistic leaders.

The initiative was led by a network of eight Learning Disability Arts organisations: Access All Areas, Mind-the-Gap, DIY Theatre, Blue Apple Theatre, Unanima, Square Pegs, Prism Arts and Hubbub.

**TRANSFORMING  
LEADERSHIP**  
NATIONAL



In March 2025, DIY Gamechangers Charlotte and Amy completed their national paid training - Amy in governance and Charlotte in directing. An important part of the programme was the residential training courses. In September, Charlotte went to a second directing residency in London, from 3rd to 6th September. The sessions were held at The Old Diorama Arts Centre.

The Transforming Leadership Programme culminated with an Access All Areas: Making Work Accessible conference, which will take place on Wednesday 12 March 2025 at The Lowry.

The event was co-hosted by Charlotte alongside colleagues from Access All Areas.

The event shared learning from the Transforming Leadership programme for increasing employment for learning disabled and autistic professionals.

- ★ Areas that were covered at the event included:
- ★ Navigating payments and benefits
- ★ Access to Work for learning disabled and autistic professionals
- ★ Co-leadership of creative spaces
- ★ Creative Support

Charlotte and DIY Creative Support Georgia, also shared their experiences of the support mentor relationship, and how it worked for them.



# Our Community Education Programme

DIY's Community Education Programme gave people with learning disabilities the opportunity to access high quality creative sessions in accessible spaces across Salford. Sessions support participants' confidence, self-esteem and well being.



# Aspire

We built on our very positive partnership with Aspire St George's, a community hub in Salford that provides support and activities for disabled adults in Salford

By taking part, participants not only grew creatively but also developed valuable transferable skills like self-awareness, presentation skills, and adaptability. These qualities increased employability and open up new opportunities. Above all, the courses promote well-being, social engagement, and a sense of achievement, helped people raise their aspirations and believe in their abilities.

In Autumn 2024, we ran a First Steps: Performance Skills course on Monday afternoons. Participants learned about performance through drama, movement, music, and poetry. They created a short performance inspired by The Greatest Showman.

During Spring 2025 we continued with More First Steps: Performance Skills, helping participants build on the skills they developed last year. By the end of the course, participants were able to:

- ★ Feel more confident as performers
- ★ Work together as a group
- ★ Create theatre about identity
- ★ Develop their singing and musical skills
- ★ Create and perform their own song.

Musician Joe Chesterman-March joined the team to lead music and song-making sessions alongside DIY Artist Georgia Affonso.

“I’ve liked being with my friends and doing the poem – I liked it when we all said, ‘we are glorious!’”

Ellie, Aspire Participant

“I like all the games and taking turns going round in a circle. My favourite game is Change Three Things.”

Stephen, Aspire Participant





## DIY BUDS

During Autumn 2024 and Spring 2025, DIY BUDS 'Not Just for Laughs' project enabled Salford residents with lived experience of learning disability to explore issues of importance to them through the lens of comedy.

Twenty sessions took place across two terms. Comedy-based exercises and activities encouraged people to work with partners, in small and large groups; improving interpersonal skills, social networks and personal relationships. Sessions incorporated exercise and movement – based activities accessible and appropriate to all members. Five sessions were led by “guest” facilitators with different comedy specialisms.

### The difference BUDS made

People with learning disabilities gained increased connection with other people with lived experience of learning disability, leading to a reduction in social isolation.

“At DIY, it’s very nice and nice to spend time with all your friends and people you get to know, and it’s fun and funny. We all work as a team, and we keep promises that we’ll all stick together. If anybody wants to join drama I would suggest to join our group because our group is marvellous. Over the time I’ve been here, my confidence has just gone up up up up up and I’ve enjoyed it.”

Chelsea

People with learning disabilities gained increased confidence and self-esteem leading to raised aspirations.

“I think I’ve really come out of my shell now, being able to be myself and do what I like to do. And be able to have friends I can count on, and be able to have fun with each other and BUDS helps you bring your inspiration out, and brings out your creativity”

Becky

People with learning disabilities demonstrated increased independence and leadership:

“I feel what I’m learning more about is how to be a leader. I’m not gonna lie, I was nervous at the start because I didn’t want to let anybody down. But as it’s gone on I’ve got really good at it. I’ve made sure that everyone’s included and everyone is feeling safe. Everyone’s having a laugh and we get good feedback as well... I’m proud of what I’ve done and I’m thinking wow this is what it takes to teach and be able to become a leader. I like it and I keep saying I’m sticking to this I want to do more.”

Becky

Participants experienced positive impacts on their health and wellbeing:

“I think comedy is really good for your health, because some people have really bad depression but having a lot of laughter in your life can be good for your health and mental health as well, it makes you feel really good inside and you’re able to spread that cheer around”.

Becky



## Visual Arts Courses

Three visual arts courses run this year were also part of DIY's Creative Arts Programme funded by Salford Community Learning. They were designed to be accessible to all and focus on much more than just creative skills. They helped learners build confidence, improve communication, develop teamwork and encourage self-expression.

This year, we established our sessions at a new base – working in the community space at Salford Museum and Art Gallery. The move opened up lots of opportunities for using creative work within the gallery as stimulus for DIY participants' own creative work.

The group has been working with visual artist Claire Hignett, to explore the artwork in the gallery and respond to it using their own creativity.



## Many thanks to the brilliant team of Creative Freelancers who have worked with DIY during this period:

Georgia Affonso

Audrey Albert

Sarah Atter

Pauline Bell

Fergus Ashcroft Walsh

Joe Chesterman-March

Bianca Danielle

Nerissa Cargill Thompson

Sue Caudle

Hilary Easter Jones

Andrea Fanchette

Roz Hall

Jenny Harris

Claire Hignett

Clare Hillyer

John Leyland

Mary O'Neill

Olivia Schofield

Molly Stedman

Jade Williams

Libby Williamson

Beka Haigh

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DIY **Leading Edge** is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund.



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**Close Knit** is supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.



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“More emphasis needs to be placed on the arts and wellbeing, that’s my take home message.  
Medical Student, University of Manchester



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