

# Community engagement

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe is one of the greatest celebrations of arts and culture on the planet – and it happens right here in our hometown. We want this festival to be as welcoming and inclusive as possible, and we're working hard to reduce and remove barriers to ensure that anyone can come and take part.

We believe everyone should have the opportunity to express themselves through creativity and experience the thrill of live performance, and the Fringe is an incredible opportunity to do this. We work closely with more than 30 charities and communities across Edinburgh, all year round, to break down any barriers that might prevent groups and individuals coming to the Fringe, in particular those who would not otherwise have the opportunity to experience the festival or arts in general.

The success of the Fringe relies on the city and its residents, and we are committed to finding ways for even more Edinburgh people to engage with and enjoy the arts. No matter who you are or where you come from, everyone is welcome.



Sikh Sanjog, by David Wilkinson

## Fringe Days Out

The Fringe Days Out scheme was launched in 2017 as part of our 70th anniversary celebrations. The scheme provides Edinburgh-based charities and community groups with free Fringe ticket vouchers and bus passes, so that their whole festival experience is free.

Since 2017, more than 12,500 people have used Fringe Days Out to visit the festival, many for the first time. The Fringe Society works throughout the year to identify and minimise barriers to attendance, whether social, economic or geographical; this supports our vision to "give anyone a stage and everyone a seat", deepening cultural engagement across the city.

**2,731 people took part in 2022  
through our community partners, and  
612 through our school partners.**

By providing people with Fringe ticket vouchers, we are empowering them to explore the full Fringe programme and see any show they wish. By providing bus passes, we are making it simpler for people to travel into town, removing the potential barrier of transport costs. In addition, we provide extra support towards other secondary costs such as volunteer expenses, refreshments or taxis for those unable to travel by public transport; the groups identify and address barriers relevant to them.

Besides costs, we provide dedicated support via a full-time, permanent staff member who also arranges events for knowledge-sharing and networking for the participating groups.

## How we identified groups

Using the Fringe Society's ticketing data in 2017, we carried out a postcode analysis of the 600,000-plus tickets sold to Edinburgh residents, enabling us to identify where our audiences were based in the city. The parts of Edinburgh with lowest ticket sales matched those recognised as areas of poverty, low income and inequality. We identified an initial 26 charities from these areas, and initiated conversations on how to make the Fringe more accessible to their communities. This has now grown to 30 charities, and we are in touch with many more.

Thirteen of our partners work with people living in the top 20% most deprived areas in Scotland; two of them operate in the top 5% most deprived areas as mapped out by the Scottish Government. Deprivation in this context relates to people having a low income and fewer resources and opportunities.

## Who is it for?

The Fringe Days Out scheme is specifically designed for people who are at risk of social exclusion. We work with a broad range of individuals and groups

including young people, single parents, isolated elderly, disabled people, global majority communities, refugees, asylum seekers, LGBT people and many more.

The charities are trusted partners in their local communities who have built long-lasting relationships with their service users. By working in partnership with these charities, we are able to reach a broad cross-section of communities in Edinburgh. We can encourage recipients to be adventurous in what they choose to see by fostering open conversations with people they know and trust. We can also start to better understand what else the Fringe Society can do to open doors and enable communities to celebrate culture and creativity on their own terms.

## Accessing the Fringe for free

Through this initiative we provide free access to ticketed shows. In addition, communities, charities and individuals can see over 1,000 free events across the city – at the street events or in individual venues, often on a "pay what you want" basis. Many of the groups spend time on the High Street, the Mound, St Andrew Square and other areas in the city where they can absorb the atmosphere and experience free performances.



Gig Buddies, by David Wilkinson



## Next steps

Fringe Days Out supports two of our six strategic development goals, launched as a part of our 75th anniversary: to be an Equitable Fringe and a Good Citizen. These are essential steps for us to take to ensure the post-covid renewal of the Fringe; to ensure that who you are or where you are from isn't a barrier to attending the festival; and that the Fringe is a force for good in and for the city of Edinburgh. Find out more about our development goals at [edfringe.com/about/about-us/fringe-development-goals](https://edfringe.com/about/about-us/fringe-development-goals)

To make these next steps a reality, we have set the ambitious target to increase the value of Fringe Days Out to £150,000 by 2025.



The Citadel Youth Centre,  
by Stewart Attwood

This will enable us to:

- Develop new long-term relationships with community partners. The free tickets, bus passes and access are the easiest things we can do; in the longer term, through listening and learning, we will develop a mature understanding of what our partners would like to see in their own communities and how we can best use our resources to help them realise their cultural ambitions.
- Develop our complimentary Community Ticketing Initiative (CTI; previously the Children and Young People ticketing scheme) to better support, promote and widen access for those who are vulnerable, marginalised or isolated. Via CTI, Fringe artists have generously donated tickets to enable access for those who wouldn't otherwise be able to go. Our ambition is to grow this scheme alongside Fringe Days Out, making better use of the resources and knowledge we have in-house and creating synergies between both projects.
- Develop new tools and resources to help underrepresented audiences navigate the Fringe and develop their cultural literacy.
- Help our community partners make connections with other festivals and cultural partners to increase opportunities for engagement in the arts. We have seen as a result of our engagement that participants are empowered to reach out to other festivals and commission artists we've introduced them to outwith Fringe projects.
- Seek other partners, such as food and drink providers and local businesses, to broaden Fringe Days Out, offering a richer and more engaged experience.

## Testimonials

'I believe the vouchers were even more beneficial this year, due to the cost-of-living crisis – a lot of families we passed on vouchers to said they would otherwise not be able to afford to go.' (Thomas Lynch, Service Manager, Dads Rock)

'Some mums didn't feel confident at all about going to the Fringe and were encouraged by others who had gone on trips. Smaller groups on Facebook spread the word about their trips too. Participants facilitated trips for their peers – which is the 'holy grail' of this kind of project.' (Kate Griffin, Interim Chief Executive, WHALE Arts)

'Because of the engagement with the Fringe Days Out over the last couple of years our users now have an appetite for this kind of stuff and they ask for more. So we are now involved with the Science Festival and some of the other festivals too.' (Scott Troup, Young Adult Carers Project Worker, SPACE and The Broomhouse Hub)

'As soon as the show finished the mums turned to me and said, 'Sign us up for everything, we want to come to more shows.' They really enjoyed the experience and it opened their eyes to something new.' (Sikh Sanjog community worker)

'I had a fantastic time. I love going to a Fringe show, but I find it more difficult to get out of the house now, and never go out alone in the evening. The singers were lovely and though I am in my 80s, I felt as though I was 18 again listening to them perform the music I love.' (Jean, Re-engage participant)

'It is a gift with dignity.' (Dot Horne, Chief Executive, 6VT Edinburgh City Youth Café)

We have collated three case studies online. You can read them here:

<https://www.edfringe.com/support-us/why-support-us/spotlight-stories>



Re-engage, by David Wilkinson

## You can help

If you've been inspired by any of these ideas and think you can help the Fringe Society achieve any or all of our development goals, we would love to hear from you. For more information, email [support.us@edfringe.com](mailto:support.us@edfringe.com) or call +44 (0)131 226 0036.